VISIT…

PAUL

VEYNE

FOUCAULT

HIS THOUGHT, HIS CHARACTER

Foucault

In grateful memory of our teachers,
Hans-Georg Pflaum and Louis Robert

Foucault

His Thought, His Character

Paul Veyne

Translated by Janet Lloyd

polity

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Introduction

No, Foucault was not a structuralist thinker; nor was he the product of a certain line of '1968 thinking'. Nor was he a relativist or a historicist; nor was he bent on sniffing out ideology everywhere. He was something that, in this day and age, is rare, a *sceptic* thinker[1] who believed only in the truth of facts, the countless historical facts that fill the pages of his books, never in the truth of ideas. For he acknowledged no transcendent principles as the foundation of truth. Yet he was not a nihilist; he recognized the existence of human liberty (it is a word that frequently occurs in his texts) and he did not think that, even when set up as a doctrine of 'disenchantment', the loss of all metaphysical and religious bases ever discouraged that freedom from having beliefs, hopes, indignations and revolts (he himself was an example, for he was a militant of a kind, a new type of intellectual; and in politics, he was a *reformer*). However, he considered it to be false and pointless to argue about his battles, to wax loquacious about his indignations, or to generalize. 'Do not use thought to confer the value of truth upon any political practice,' he wrote.[2]

He was not the enemy of man and humanity that he was believed to be. He simply reckoned that humanity could not get any absolute truth to descend from heaven or to operate,

in sovereign manner, in a heaven of truths. He believed that all he could do was react to the truths and realities of his time and perhaps respond to them in an innovative fashion. Like Montaigne, and in direct contrast to Heidegger,[3] he reckoned that 'we have no means of communication with Being'.[4] Notwithstanding, his scepticism did not cause him to cry, 'Ah, everything is doubtful!' You could say that this supposed sixty-eightist was an empiricist and a philosopher of understanding, not of any presumptuous Reason. Without being too insistent about it, he ended up with a general conception of the human condition, the freedom with which it could react to things, and also its finite nature. Foucault's philosophy is, in truth, an empirical kind of anthropology with a coherence of its own, the originality of which is founded on a historical critique.

Now let me move on to details, but not before, in the interests of clarity, I first state the two principles by which I work. 1. What is ultimately at stake for human history, even above power, the economy and so forth, is the truth: what economic regime would ever confess to being false? But this problem of historical truth has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with any questioning of the innocence of Dreyfus or the reality of the gas chambers. 2. If historical understanding, for its part, desires to push its analyses of a given period as far as possible, it must move on from societies and their mind-sets, to the general truths in which minds in that period were, without realizing it, trapped like fish in a glass bowl.

A sceptic, meanwhile, is a dual being. So long as he keeps on thinking, he remains outside the fishbowl and can watch the fish swimming round and round inside it. But given that one has to live, he then finds himself within the bowl, a fish like all the rest, faced with deciding which candidate he will vote for in the forthcoming elections (even if he cannot claim his decision to be based on the truth). This sceptic is at once an observer, outside the fishbowl about which he has misgivings, yet also one of those very goldfish. However, there is nothing tragic about that duality.

The name of the observer who is the hero of this little book is Michel Foucault, a slender, elegant and decisive person whom nothing and nobody could force to back down and who, with his intellectual cut-and-thrust, handled a pen as though it were a sword: which is why I might well have entitled this book *The Samurai and the Goldfish*.

1

In Universal History, Everything is Singular: 'Discourse'

When *The History of Madness* was published, some of the most well-disposed French historians (including myself) failed at first to appreciate the scale and significance of the book. I thought Foucault was simply showing that our conception of madness has varied greatly in the course of the centuries. But that told us nothing new; we already knew that human realities betray a radical contingency (well known in the form of the 'arbitrariness of cultures') or, at the very least, are diverse and variable. There are no historical invariants, no essences, no natural objects. Our ancestors developed strange ideas about madness, sexuality, punishment and power. But it was as though we ourselves had silently recognized that those days of error were over, and believed that we were doing better than our ancestors and had discovered the truth around which they had stumbled. 'That Greek text speaks of love in accordance with the ideas of the time,' we would say to ourselves. But was our modern idea of love any better than theirs? We should not have presumed so to claim had that apparently trifling and unimportant question been put to us. But do we, even now, think about it seriously and philosophically? Foucault did.

I had not realized that, without claiming to, Foucault was taking part in one of the great debates in modern thinking:

does truth, or does it not, correspond to its object; does it or does it not resemble what it states, as common sense supposes? The fact is that it is hard to see how we could possibly know if it does resemble what it states, since we have no other source of information that might offer confirmation. But let that pass. For Foucault, as for Nietzsche, William James, Austin, Wittgenstein, Ian Hacking and many others, each of them with views of their own, knowledge cannot be a faithful mirror to reality. No more than Richard Rorty[1] does Foucault believe in that mirror, or in that 'specular' concept of knowledge. According to him, the object, in all its materiality, cannot be separated from the formal frameworks through which we come to know it, frameworks that Foucault, settling upon an ill-chosen word, calls 'discourse'. That, in a nutshell, says it all.

Misunderstood, this concept of truth not corresponding to reality has made some people believe[2] that, according to Foucault, mad people were not mad and that to speak of madness was nothing but ideology. Even a man such as Raymond Aron believed this to be the line taken by *A History of Madness*, as he told me, without beating about the bush; he protested that madness is all too real: you only need to see a madman to be sure of that. And he was quite right. Foucault himself held that, even though madness was not what its 'discourse' claimed it to be, that did not mean that there was no such thing.[3]

So what does Foucault mean by 'discourse'? Something very simple: a most precise and close description of a historical formation, stripped bare, a revelation of its ultimate individual difference.[4] Reaching the *differentia ultima* of a dated singularity requires an intellectual effort of perception: it is necessary to strip the event of the excessive draperies that make it unexceptional and rationalize it. The consequences of doing so are far-reaching, as we shall see.

In his first book, Foucault's heuristic starting point was a classification of the 'discourse' on what we call madness (or insanity, as earlier 'discourse' put it). The books that fol-

lowed offered other subjects to exemplify the sceptic philosophy that he had developed from his attention to details. However, he himself never fully expounded his doctrine, but left that redoubtable task to his commentators.[5]

In the present work, I shall be endeavouring to explain to myself the thought of this man who was a great friend and, it seems to me, a great mind. I shall be citing repeatedly from his *Dits et Ecrits* (*Sayings and Writings*), as he refers there to the bases of his doctrine more often than he does in his major works.

Before I take the plunge, though, let us consider an example. Suppose we were planning to write a history of love or of sexuality through the ages. We might feel satisfied with our work when we had reached the point at which a reader could learn about the variations that pagans or Christians had elaborated, in their ideas and practices, on the well-known theme of sex. But suppose, having reached that point, there was still something that bothered us and we thought that we should press on further with our analysis. We might, for example, have felt that in one way or another a Greek or medieval author had expressed himself using particular words or turns of phrase which, despite our analysis, left a residue, a hint that suggested that, instead of taking no notice of that residue, as if it were just a clumsy expression, an approximation, a dead passage in the text, we should make an extra effort to make explicit what it appeared to imply. And suppose we were successful.

Then the scales would fall from our eyes: once a variation is made thoroughly explicit, the eternal theme is wiped out and all that remain in its place are successive variations, all different from one another, which we may call the 'pleasures' of Antiquity, the 'flesh' of the Middle Ages and the 'sexuality' of the modern age. Those are three general ideas that some people have successively elaborated around a kernel that is incontestably real and probably trans-historical, but that remains inaccessible, lurking behind them. Inaccessible or, rather, impossible to extricate: we would inevitably turn them into 'discourse'.

Let us suppose that, thanks to the 'programme' of some branch of science, we learn something true, something scientific about homosexuality (for Foucault, the sciences amounted to more than empty words): for example (a gratuitous supposition on my part), that homosexual tastes are genetic in origin. Well, and then what? What, actually, *is* homosexuality? What should we do with that nugget, be it small or large, of the truth? Foucault wanted there to be some kind of 'discourse' on the subject of even an insignificant detail that related solely to anatomy or physiology, and not to the identity of individuals: in short, some detail that one would only discuss either in bed or with one's doctor.

> Do we really need a *true* sex? [the ironic italics are Foucault's own.] With a consistency that borders on stubbornness, the societies of the modern West have replied in the affirmative. They have relentlessly brought up this question of 'a true sex' within an order of things in which one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of bodies and the intensity of their pleasures.[6]

Love in Antiquity gave rise to 'discourse' about the 'pleasures' of Aphrodite that were in no way suspect, and about how they should be controlled ethically and within the city. It addressed amorous gestures of the period, as timid as it was sinless, a period in which, at night, only a libertine would make love, not in the dark, but by lamplight, and in which civic morality distinguished not so much between the sexes as between the active and passive roles of the lovers – a period in which the ideal of self-control meant that a Don Juan would be considered effeminate and in which the obsessional reprobation of cunnilingus (which, nonetheless, was practised) implied a reversal of a hierarchy of the sexes; a period in which a pederast became a figure of fun because he carried his pleasure so far that his heart was left as bereft of feeling as an artichoke.

Now let us take an example less agreeable than love: the penal code through the ages. It is not enough to say that,

under the *ancien régime*, punishments were atrocious, reflecting the brutality of the *mores* of the age. The royal sovereign 'came down with all his might', inflicting the horrific tortures of the period upon a rebellious subject, so as to demonstrate to all and sundry the enormity of both the punishment and the disproportion between the powers of the rebel and those of his king, whom the ceremonial torture avenged. With the advent of the Age of Enlightenment, punishment inflicted in private by a specialized administrative apparatus became preventative and corrective. Now imprisonment was to be a coercive technique of training, designed to set in place new habits in any citizen who had no respect for the law.[7] This was assuredly an instance of humanitarian progress, but we need furthermore to recognize that it was not just an improvement: it was a total change.

Fifteen centuries earlier, in the arenas of the Roman Empire, the deaths of those condemned were prepared in mythological settings. A condemned man was dressed up in the costume of a Heracles committing suicide by fire, and was burnt alive; Christian women were disguised as Danaids and were accordingly raped before they died, or else as Dirce, strapped to the horns of a bull. These were sarcastic staged events, each one a *ludibrium*. The civic body, which the offender had presumed to rival, sneered at him, laughing in his face, to show him that he was not the stronger. Each of those successive 'discourses' was implied in the penal law, actions, institutions, powers, customs and even buildings, all of which reflected it and formed what Foucault calls the 'set-up' (*dispositif*). (Translator's note: *dispositif* is usually a hard word to translate, as it can mean so many things, depending on the context. In the present book, however, it consistently means what I have called the 'set-up'.)

As you can see, we started off without any preconceptions, with detailed 'concrete facts';[8] and we then discovered variations so original that each constituted a theme on its own. I have been using words such as 'theme' and 'variations', but Foucault had a better way of putting things. In 1979, he observed in his notebook: 'Do not pass universals through

the sieve of history; rather, strain history through a line of thought that rejects universals.'[9] Ontologically speaking, variations are all that exist and the expression 'a trans-historical theme' is meaningless. Foucault, like Weber and all good historians, is a nominalist. Heuristically, it is better to start off with detailed practices, details of what was done and what was said, and then make the intellectual effort to make explicit the 'discourse' surrounding them. This is more fruitful (but more difficult both for the historian and for his readers)[10] than starting off from a general, well-known idea, for if that is what you do, you are in danger of looking no further than that idea and failing to notice the ultimate, decisive differences that would reduce it to nothing.

But let us now forget those tortures and return to pleasures. It has been easy to distinguish pagan pleasures from the Christian concept of the 'flesh' (that 'discourse' on the sinful flesh and also on nature, which should be followed because it is a divine creation). That was followed by other 'discourses', for instance, the modern one about 'sex',[11] to which contributions have been made by physiology, medicine and psychiatry; and possibly also the discourse of post-modern 'gender' studies, along with feminism and permissiveness, or rather the subjective right to be oneself and say so (Didier Eribon would at this point remark that psychoanalysis would not survive this). One senses that every 'discourse' brings into play, around love, a whole host of associated elements: customs, words, bodies of knowledge, norms, laws and institutions; in fact, we should do better to speak of discursive practices or even, using a term loaded with meaning, to which we shall be returning, the whole 'set-up'.[12]

But where were we? Instead of the commonplace notion of love, we thus discovered many bizarre little objects peculiar to the particular period, details that had never before been noticed. What we did was bring to light the submerged part of love in the period under consideration. The visible part, which was all that had been seen, was on the whole familiar. In contrast, once we had managed to make explicit

the part that was not visible, not consciously recognized, what we were faced with was an object that was 'incomplete and fragmented',[13] with jagged contours that corresponded to nothing sensible and by no means filled the capacious and imposing draperies that had previously covered it. Those contours put one in mind of the historical frontiers of nations that are traced in zigzag lines by the hazards of history, rather than by natural borders.

To be sure, our idea of sexuality or of madness (an idea that the subconscious, implicit 'discourse' follows closely, recording most precisely the singularity and strangeness that we cannot see) – that idea, together with its 'discourse', assuredly does relate to 'the thing in itself' (if I may take advantage of Kantian vocabulary), namely, the reality that it claims to represent. Sexuality and madness are things that certainly exist; they are not ideological inventions. However much one speculates, the fact remains that a human being is a sexual animal, as physiology and sexual instinct prove. All that has been thought about love and madness, down through the centuries, signals the existence and, as it were, *emplacement* of things in themselves. However, we are not in possession of a truth that corresponds to things, since we can only reach a 'thing in itself' by way of the idea that we have constructed of it in each different epoch (an idea of which its 'discourse' is the ultimate formulation, the *differentia ultima*). So we can only reach it as a 'phenomenon', for we cannot separate the thing in itself from the 'discourse' in which it is bound up for us or 'buried in the sand', as Foucault put it. We could know nothing without these kinds of presuppositions: had there been no 'discourses', object x that has successively been seen as divine possession, madness, insanity or dementia, and so forth would nonetheless exist, although, in our minds, we would be unable to place it.

The point is that all phenomena are singular, every historical or sociological fact is a singularity. Foucault thinks that general, trans-historical Truths do not exist, since human facts, acts and words do not come about naturally from a cause that is their origin; nor do they faithfully reflect the

object to which they refer. Over and above their misleading generality or their supposed functionality, their singularity stems from their bizarre 'discourse'. And that singularity of theirs in every case stems from chance developments and a complicated concatenation of the causalities at work; for the history of humanity is not upheld by reality, rationality, functionality or any dialectic: we must 'identify the singularity of events, stripped of any uniform purposiveness'[14] or any functionalism. The tacit suggestion that Foucault puts to sociologists and historians (a suggestion that some were independently putting into practice)[15] is to push the analysis of historical and sociological formations as far as possible, in order to strip bare their singular strangeness.

To sum up: big words cover thoughts and realities ('discourses' and 'discursive practices') that are far narrower and have quirky edges. Here is another example of the gap that separates general and trans-historical ideas, which are always false, from little facts, the truth of which can be verified. These days, a Catholic with generous political opinions will be inclined to ascribe to Christian charity such of his opinions that favour socialism, greater economic equality and a redistribution of wealth. But how is it that his religion never conceived of such ideas until the workers' movement of the nineteenth century? Catholicism never thought of abolishing slavery.

Around AD 300, the Christian Lactantius noted that some were rich while others were poor and some were masters while others were slaves. He went on to say that wherever all are not equal, there is no equality; and inequality excludes justice, which rests upon the fact that all men are born equal. He did acknowledge that among the Christians there were likewise both rich and poor and masters and slaves. However, he explained serenely, Christians consider them all as equal and brothers, for what matters is the spirit, not the body; the slaves are only slaves physically. Spiritually they are our brothers.

Charity was a big word that only covered small gestures, such as alms-giving and the notion of a religious fraternity

in Christ. So in the Old South of the USA, prior to 1865, large landowners took care to baptize the black slaves that they acquired through the slave trade.

Every era has its own fishbowl

Foucault, whose thinking became more precise only with the passing of time and whose technical vocabulary remained irregular for many years, evoked these singularities with words such as 'discourse', but also ones relating to discursive practices, presuppositions, *episteme*, and 'set-ups'.

Rather than become bogged down by all those different words, let us stick to the principal point: we think about human things using general ideas that we believe to correspond to them, but nothing human ever does, whether it be rational, or universal. And that surprises and alarms our common sense.

Accordingly, a reassuring illusion causes us to perceive each 'discourse' through general ideas and, as a result, we fail to recognize the diversity and singularity of every one of them. Ordinarily, we think using conventional ideas or generalities, which is why those 'discourses' remain 'subconscious' and thus escape our notice. The opening passage of Aristotle's *Physics* declares that children call all men 'Papa' and all women 'Mama'. What is needed is the kind of historical study that Foucault calls 'archaeology' or 'genealogy' (I will not go into details) to bring that 'discourse' into the light. Such archaeology serves as a demystifying balance-sheet.

For every time we reach that *differentia ultima* of the phenomenon, namely, the 'discourse' that describes it, we invariably find that the phenomenon is bizarre, arbitrary, gratuitous (a couple of pages back, I compared it to frontiers traced by historical boundaries). The balance-sheet: when one has thus enquired in-depth into a number of phenomena, one notices the singularity of each one and how arbitrary they all are; this inductively leads one on to a philosophical

critique of knowledge, to the realization that human things have no basis, and to scepticism on the score of general ideas (but only general ones: not on the score of singularities such as the innocence of Dreyfus or the exact date of the Battle of Teutoburg).

Works on history and physics that do not communicate through general ideas are assuredly full of truths. But the fact remains that a human being, the subject on which philosophers tend to expound, is not totally in control; he does not dominate time or truth. 'Each one of us can think only as people think in our own era', as Jean d'Ormesson, a pupil of Foucault at the École normale and a fellow graduate in philosophy, writes, in agreement, here, with Foucault; and he goes on: 'Aristotle, Saint Augustine and even Bossuet were incapable of bringing themselves to condemn slavery, to a condemnation which, a few centuries later, had become self-evident.' To paraphrase Marx, humanity raises problems only at the point when it resolves them. For as soon as slavery collapsed, along with the whole legal and mental set-up that supported it, so did the 'truth' of it.

In every age, contemporaries are thus trapped in 'discourses' as if in a deceptively transparent glass bowl, unaware of what those glass bowls are and even that they are there. False generalities and 'discourses' vary from age to age. But in every period they are taken to be true. In this way, truth is reduced to *telling the truth*, to saying whatever conforms with what is accepted as the truth, even though this will make people smile a century later.

The originality of Foucault's research is that it works on truth in the context of time. Let me begin by illustrating that with a simple example: behind Foucault's *oeuvre* – as behind Heidegger's – lies an unsaid and crushing truism: the ancient and recent past of humanity constitutes a vast cemetery of now dead great truths. That has been perfectly clear for over a century, indeed over a millennium. In the course of that long time, philosophy has nevertheless thought about many other things, rather than that primary truth. Every thinker

– Hegel, Comte, Husserl . . . – hoped to be the one who would personally bring the age of error to an end. Foucault, in contrast, did tackle that problem of the cemetery and did so from a personal and unexpected angle; this involved an in-depth excavation of 'discourse', making explicit the ultimate differences between historical formations and thereby putting an end to the latest general ideas.

Let me put that another way: most philosophies take as their starting point the relationship of the philosopher, or human beings generally, with Being, the world, or God. Foucault, for his part, starts off with what different people do as if it went without saying and with what they say in the belief that it is true. Or rather, given that the vast majority of these human beings are dead, he begins with all that they may have said and done in different periods. In short, he takes history as his starting point and selects from it samples (madness, punishment, sex) in order to make explicit the underlying 'discourse' and infer from this an empirical anthropology.

To make explicit a 'discourse' or discursive practice will involve interpreting what people did and said, and understanding the assumptions that underlie their actions, words and institutions, which is something that we all do all the time: we understand one another among ourselves. The instrument that Foucault used, namely hermeneutics, the elucidation of meaning, is something people use every day.[16] This everyday practice was not affected by the scepticism that undermines general ideas. His kind of hermeneutics, which covered the meaning of the actions and words of other people, homed closely in on that meaning. This was in stark contrast to rediscovering an eternal Eros with psychoanalysis or any philosophical anthropology. Understanding what others do and say is what actors have to do, for in order to understand the characters that they represent, they need to put themselves inside their skin. If that actor happens also to be a historian, he must furthermore become a dramatist in order to compose the text of his role and find the words (or concepts) to express it.

I should quickly add that this hermeneutics, which sets out to do no more than pinpoint the positive meaning of empirical data, was quite the reverse of the 'linguistic turn' of the 1960s, which sometimes ended up by obliterating the solid positive evidence so dear to Foucault in a fog of endless interpretations ('the meaning of a text changes with the times and whoever interprets it').[17] Somewhere or other I read a vicious attack against a certain 'post-modern tendency largely created by disciples of Foucault, which ends up relativizing everything and asserting that everything is a matter of interpretation'. Well, I cannot vouch for those disciples, but so far as Foucault himself was concerned, nothing could be further from the truth. Convinced that a text is not the same thing as its interpretation, Foucault's fundamental method is to understand as well as possible what the author of that text wished to say in his own time.

Foucault favours a kind of hermeneutic positivism: we can know nothing for certain about the self, the world or the Good, but between ourselves, whether living or dead, we can understand one another. Whether our understanding is correct or mistaken is another matter (good understanding presupposes that one has been brought up in a certain tradition or else has been steeped in a foreign one; one cannot become a Greek scholar simply through improvisation), but we may, after all, end up understanding one another.

This rates as a hermeneutics because of the principle of 'the irreducibility of thought' (we should not forget, at this point, that the root of thought is not consciousness); 'There is no experience that is not, in some way, a kind of thinking.' Historical facts 'may well not be independent of the concrete influences of social history'; nevertheless, human beings can only experience those influences 'through thought'. Class interests or relations of economic production may be 'universal structures'; forces of production and the steam engine may constitute 'determining concrete influences on social existence':[18] all the same, in order to affect life and constitute events, they do have to be processed by thought. And that

may, to some extent, justify the use of the word 'discourse', for, after all, thought is closer to words than to a steam engine.

The method adopted by this hermeneutics is the following: instead of starting out with universals as a grid of intelligibility for 'concrete practices' that are both thought about and understood, even if they take place in silence, one takes as one's starting point those very practices and the singular and bizarre 'discourse' that they presuppose, 'so as to, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices'. One then discovers the real truth of the past and 'that universals do not exist'.[19] To cite Foucault's own words, 'My starting point is the decision, at once theoretical and methodological, that consists in saying: suppose that universals simply do not exist'; for example, suppose that madness does not exist, or rather that it is a false concept (even if something real corresponds to it). 'In these circumstances, what kind of history can be devised for these disparate events and these diverse practices that are apparently classified as some supposed thing called madness?'[20] Those events and practices end up by constituting a veritable 'madness' in our eyes, instead of remaining something certainly real, but unknown, unnoticed, indeterminate and nameless – or, rather, either unknown or falsely interpreted. That is the only choice open for madness or any other human phenomenon, unless each is regarded as a singularity.

I have been using the term 'singularities': the 'discourses' that underlie phenomena are singular in both senses of the word: they are both strange and, also, they do not fit into any generality, each being the only one of its kind. So, in order to distinguish them, let us begin with details and go back[21] to take as our starting point the concrete practices of power, its procedures and its instruments and so forth. We are then in a position to make explicit a 'discourse' – a collection of real practices – that reaches its complete form in the eighteenth century. Foucault describes this as 'governmentalism', which is different from the medieval 'discourse' of a state based on Justice and also from that of an admin-

istrative state of the Renaissance. And here is another regression: in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault sensed, not so much a continuity in penal methods, but a tacit difference between the punishments of the *ancien régime*, when the sovereign 'came down with all his force' upon the tortured man, and our present-day prison system.

Using (or abusing) a Freudian analogy, Foucault declares that he 'has endeavoured to distinguish an autonomous domain, that of subconscious knowledge' and 'to find in the history of science and human knowledge something that might be akin to the subconscious'.[22] 'Consciousness is never present in such descriptions'[23] of 'discourses'. 'Discourses' have 'remained invisible' and constitute 'the subconscious of, not the person speaking, but *the thing said*' (my italics), 'a positive subconscious of knowledge, a level that eluded the consciousness' of the agents and that they used 'without being aware of doing so'.[24]

Obviously, the word 'subconscious' is no more than a metonymy; there is no subconscious, Freudian or otherwise, except in our brains; so, instead of 'subconscious', read 'implicit'. Here is a banal example: Louis XIV was glorified as a great conqueror; and that suggests or implies the great importance, in his day, of the prestige and power of a sovereign. That prestige and power were measured by the extent of his possessions, which a king was expected to extend by waging wars. After the downfall of Napoleon, Benjamin Constant was to show that 'this spirit of conquest' was a thing of the past.

This kind of subconscious that we are unsuitably calling 'discourse' consists precisely in that which is not said and remains implicit. To which one might add, along with Roger-Pol Droit, that the borders between the conscious and the subconscious 'cannot pre-exist the dividing line that defines them',[25] since they are nothing more than a line drawn by a historical frontier: they date from that frontier; they are contemporaneous with a singular event that they simply emphasize; they remain a part of the subconscious, considered as a permanent structure of the psyche.

'Discourse' is that invisible part, that unthought thought that makes every historical event singular. The following few lines will convey how difficult it is to perceive such 'discourse':

> Although the statement cannot be hidden, it is not visible either; it is not presented to the perception as the manifest bearer of its limits and characteristics. It requires a certain change of viewpoint and attitude to be recognized and examined in itself. Perhaps it is like the over-familiar that constantly eludes one; those familiar transparencies which, although they conceal nothing in their density, are nevertheless not entirely clear.[26]

Yes, a penetrating eye is needed to perceive this, and that is why the methodological progress represented by Foucault's historical writing is also a breakthrough for the historical act as a whole. It represents a progress that *il disegno* represented in the Florentine art of the Renaissance.

Foucault's art captures individuality by dispensing with conventions. The paths followed by human history seem to be marked by big words that are themselves conventional: universalism, individualism,[27] identity,[28] disenchantment of the world,[29] rationalization, monotheism . . . Each of these words serves as a heading under which to include many different things, for there is no such thing as rationalization in general.[30] Bossuet's *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture sainte* is as rational, in its own way, as is Rousseau's *Social Contract*; and Hitlerian racism grew out of the rationalism of social Darwinism. When working as a historian, one needs to exercise 'a systematic scepticism with regard to all anthropological universals' and only acknowledge the existence of an invariant as a last resort, after having tried everything possible to resolve the matter: 'One must not accept anything of that kind unless it is, strictly speaking, indispensable.'[31]

It is worth pointing out, in passing, that these 'discourses', these ultimate differences in every historical formation, every discipline, every practice – these 'discourses' have nothing to

do with any zeitgeist. Foucault, who had no time for 'totalizing history' or 'the spirit of the age',[32] shared nothing in common with Spengler.

'That may be', you will say, 'but Foucault's scepticism is simply an idealist ideology that blots out realities. Class interest and all its ferocity certainly does exist!' I beg your pardon! Nevertheless, do not forget that in every period, that interest is a singularity: the interest of the Roman ruling or senatorial class was political rather than economic and not the same as that of the dominant class in modern capitalism. Like everything else, class interest has its own historicity, its own 'discourse'.

That 'material' interest is irreducibly affected by thought, as we have seen, and also by liberty, as we shall see, so that there is a certain 'give' or instability to it. A capitalist class defends its interests with varying degrees of ferocity and flexibility and is often divided as regards the best policy to follow to protect them;[33] for it is composed of individuals of flesh and blood, not puppets in the service of some dogmatic schema. Which is not to say that that interest 'lacks any universal form', namely the very notion of class interest, 'but the very process of bringing those universal forms into play is itself historical . . . That is what may be called the principle of singularity'[34] that causes history to be a series of ruptures.

The task of a historian who follows Foucault is to detect those ruptures that are concealed by misleading continuities. If he studies the history of democracy, he will assume, as did Jean-Pierre Vernant, that Athenian democracy has nothing in common with modern democracy apart from its name. The hermeneutics of 'discourse' thus pushes to its limits one of the methods used by historical research for over two centuries: never block out local, or rather temporal, colour (perhaps we should think back to Chateaubriand and the surprise caused by Augustin Thierry's *Récits des temps mérovingiens*, in which Clovis reverted to being Chlodovig). Foucault carries on what, since Romanticism,[35] has constituted the major task of historians: to make explicit the origi-

nality of a historical formation, without seeking for any natural or reasonable explanation, as our all too human tendency to render things commonplace at the cost of anachronism inclines us to do.

Furthermore, Foucault the philosopher simply practises the method adopted by all historians, that of tackling every historical question on its own merits and never as a particular case of a general problem, let alone of a philosophical question. Foucault's books thus constitute a critique directed at, not so much the methods of historians, but philosophy itself, in which, according to him, the major problems dissolve into historical questions, 'since all concepts have to come to be'.[36]

2

There is No 'a priori' that is Not Historical

Foucault therefore hoped to see the French historical school opening up to admit his ideas. That is where he placed all his hopes, for was this not an open-minded elite with an international reputation? Were not those historians prepared to acknowledge that everything was historical, even the truth? And that there are no trans-historical constants? Unfortunately for him, those historians were at the time taken up with their own project, that of explaining history by relating it to society: in Foucault's books they could not find the realities that they regularly looked for in a society, but did find problems that did not concern them: namely, the problem of 'discourse' and the problem of truth.

Those historians already had a method of their own and were not disposed to open up to a different kind of enquiry, that of a philosopher, in works that they did not understand and that were, in effect, even more difficult for them than for other readers, for they were only capable of reading them in relation to their own methodological grid. In their eyes, what Foucault wrote was a tissue of abstractions that had nothing to do with historical practice. The notions that they found in his books were not those to which they were accustomed and that seemed to them the only possible currency for a historian. Foucault seemed to them to be paying them

off in philosophical paper money: they themselves, they thought, dealt with realities. Not all of them were aware that their own prose unconsciously depended on conceptualization and that basically their notions were just as abstract as Foucault's. How was it possible to speak of a reality, tell a story and describe the characters in it without having recourse to concepts? To write history was to conceptualize. If you think about the storming of the Bastille (was it a revolt or was it a revolution?), you are already conceptualizing.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, Foucault, in his disappointment, reacted violently. Here is how he rudely summarized the evolution of the historical *Annales* school over the past three-quarters of a century:

> Years ago, historians were very proud to discover that they could write not only the history of battles, kings and institutions, but also that of the economy. And they were astounded when the canniest of them told them that it was also possible to write the history of feelings, behaviour, bodies. The fact that the history of the West cannot be dissociated from the way in which the truth is produced and imposes its effects is something that even they may, perhaps, one day learn.[1] 'L'esprit vient bien aux filles.' [Translator's note: Foucault is here referring to a somewhat salacious eighteenth-century novel entitled *Comment l'esprit vient aux filles*. He likens the historians to naive, innocent girls who, with experience, find that the scales fall from their eyes.]

It was definitely not a good start.

A colloquium involving a few historians and himself led to a clash in 1978.[2] I must – alas – forbear to recount at length this conflict so crucial and so fascinating to his reading public. A disappointed and bitter Foucault confided his grievances to me: causal explanation in which, he claimed, 'the historians superstitiously believed', was not the sole form of intelligibility, the *nec plus ultra* of historical analysis.[3] 'One has to discard the preconception according to which history without causality would not be history';[4] there

are ways to rationalize a whole swathe of the past other than by establishing links of causality.[5]

Possibly with a famous study by Heidegger in mind, he added: 'All they think about is society, which is for them what *Physis* was for the Greeks.'[6] According to Foucault, French historians made society 'the general horizon of their analyses'.[7] I suppose their theory stemmed from Durkheim and Marx. Writing a scientific history of literature or art, for example, meant relating art to society; or, at least, that was what was taught around 1950 in certain research seminars. Foucault, however, had learnt from the composer Jean Barraqué that forms were non-transitive to society or to any totality (the spirit of the age, for example).[8] In the view of the historians, if everything did not originate in society, at least that was where it ended up; society was both the matrix and the ultimate receptacle of everything. However, for a follower of Foucault, society, far from being the principle or outcome of any explanation, needed, itself, to be explained. Far from being the ultimate factor, it is what each age makes of it through all the 'discourses' and set-ups that it acquires.

In truth, Foucault was not as marginalized as he wished to think; his way of writing history was sympathetic to those who stood by what was known as the history of mentalities. He was closer to Philippe Ariès than to the *Annales* group.[9] Michelle Perrot, Arlette Farge[10] and Georges Duby liked his books. All the same, Foucault's resentment of the corporation of historians as a whole remained unqualified.

We should perhaps conclude that the source of this storm in a teacup was Foucault's intellectual ambition and the defensive reaction of historians who wished to remain as they were. Allow me to add my grain of salt to this piquant sauce. In my view, it would be a good thing for historians, if possible, first to make explicit the singular identity (the 'discourse') of the figures and historical formations whose history they are about to describe,[11] before introducing all those heroes 'into the plot' (for everything in this sublunary world is a plot that has no prime mover, whether of an economic or any other nature), and to make explicit the whys

and wherefores of the tragedies that they describe, and work out what plots were at work. With very little advice or encouragement, I did once try to do that, not very successfully, however, for the 'Foucault method' exceeded my powers of abstraction.

All the same, one can dream; one can imagine a young historian inspired by the sacred fire lit by a book by Foucault – *Discipline and Punish* for example – or by his lectures on governmentalism or on the forms and objects of powers in the modern age. What I am saying is prompted purely by my love for history. When we were students, in the early 1950s, we used to read Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and Marcel Mauss too, with passionate interest; and we listened to what Jacques Le Goff, our senior by only a few years, had to say. We dreamed of one day writing history as they wrote it. Today, I dream of young historians who dream of writing like Foucault. That would not be a rejection of our predecessors, but a continuation of the path that they opened up and of the ceaseless progress of historical methods over the past two centuries.

In this connection, I have sometimes been asked to describe the brief time of my collaboration with Foucault, when he was working on the ancient world. Foucault had declared, 'Paul Veyne helped me throughout those years.'[12] What did my contribution amount to, then? Quite simply, very little, I have to say,[13] for why should I fake modesty? The ideas were his alone (like Odysseus with his bow, abstract analysis was a weapon that only he had the strength to wield). And as for facts and sources, Foucault had a gift for discovering on his own, within no more than a few short months, everything about a particular culture or discipline, like those polyglots who astonish us when they master a new language within a few weeks (even if they then forget it in order to learn yet another).

So my own role was limited to two things: occasionally confirming his documentation, and providing encouragement and support. He would tell me in the evening about whatever he had worked on during that day, in order to see

whether I would protest in the name of scholarship. Above all, as a historian myself, I would support him by adopting a sympathetic, rather than a negative, attitude towards his method. For he was more hurt than was believed by its rejection on the part of some of my colleagues, given that he had placed more hope in them than in his fellow philosophers.

But let us put aside the outdated chronicle of the bad relations between Foucault and his historian contemporaries who were too busy writing history in their own fashion to consider any other way with open minds. The method that has thus remained Foucault's alone was to pursue as far as possible research into the differences between events that appeared to be of the same kind.

> Wherever one might be tempted to refer to a historical constant or an apparently obvious anthropological characteristic, or a factor that seems to be universally accepted, one needs to draw out a *singularity* and show that it really was not all that obvious . . .
>
> It was not that obvious that mad people should be recognized to be mentally sick; it was not that obvious that the only thing to do with a delinquent is to lock him up. It was not that obvious that the causes of illness should be sought in an individual examination of the body.[14]

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, we are told that, around 1800, following a reassessment of medical observation and a change in the 'discourse' of pathological anatomy, doctors dissecting bodies ceased to 'read' them only in order to look for particular 'signs' that were considered relevant as signifiers of a signified 'illness'. Now Laennec was able to take account of what had thitherto passed for useless details and, in consequence, he was the first who actually *saw* the very distinctive consistency of a liver affected by cirrhosis,[15] which until then, even when seen, had passed unnoticed.

An independent being less finite than man and less a prisoner of the 'discourse' of his day would always have been able to spot it, or at least could have spotted it in any period.

Unfortunately, however, 'one cannot think absolutely anything at absolutely any time'.[16] It was not until the nineteenth century that observation through a microscope, already possible in the seventeenth century, ceased to be considered a mere anecdotal curiosity that was liable to deflect an observer from serious reality (Bichat and Laennec himself stuck to what was visible with the naked eye and refused to use a microscope).[17] The 'discourse' on what is visible for a long time remained 'impossible to get round' (*incontournable* in French) in the literal sense of that adjective:[18] so opaque and so impossible to sidestep that for many years the mite was considered to be the smallest of all animals. No one envisaged the possibility of even smaller animals, ones so small that they would be invisible; meanwhile, moving to infinity in the opposite direction, nor did anyone conceive that there might be planets that did not shine sufficiently brightly for us to see them with the naked eye.

Foucault's presentation of history is characterized by a tacit metaphysical sensitivity. Given that we cannot think absolutely anything at absolutely any time, our thinking does not stray beyond the frontiers constituted by the 'discourse' of the moment. Everything that we think we know is, unbeknown to us, limited; we cannot see the limits and are even unaware that they exist. When someone is driving by night, he can see nothing beyond the range of the car's headlights and, often enough, furthermore, he cannot make out how far that range extends, yet cannot see that he cannot see. To change the metaphor, we are constantly confined by a fishbowl whose containing sides we cannot even see. Given that 'discourse' cannot be sidestepped, even if we are particularly fortunate, we cannot perceive the true truth or even a future truth, or what purports to be one.

Of course, a particular 'discourse', together with the institutional and social set-up that currently obtains, constitutes a status quo that persists only for as long as the historical circumstances and human liberty forbear to replace it by another; we can escape from our provisional fishbowl only thanks to the pressure exerted by new events as they happen,

or else when someone or other invents a new 'discourse' that is well received.[19] However, even then, we shall leave one fishbowl only to find ourselves trapped in a new one. In short, this fishbowl or 'discourse' is 'what may be called a historical *a priori*'.[20] To be sure, that a priori, far from being an unmoving law that tyrannizes human thought,[21] is constantly changing, and we ourselves eventually move on to a new one. But we are not conscious of this: those who live at the time have always been unaware of the limits that it imposes, just as we ourselves, today, are unable to perceive our own limits.

Three errors to be avoided

At this point let us identify two or three confusions that are to be avoided. A 'discourse' is not an infrastructure; nor is it another word for 'ideology'. In fact, it is, rather, the opposite, despite what is often claimed either in writing or by word of mouth. It was recently claimed that Edward Said's well-known book on Orientalism attacked this branch of learning for being nothing but 'discourse' that legitimated Western imperialism.[22] But that is wrong, doubly wrong. 'Discourse' is not the appropriate word here, and Orientalism is not an ideology. Foucault's 'discourses' are spectacles through which, in every age, people have perceived everything, and have thought and acted. They affect both those who dominate and those who are dominated; they are not lies invented by the former in order to fool the latter and justify their own domination. 'The regime of truth is not simply ideological or superstructural; it has been a condition for the formation and development of capitalism.'[23]

No doubt Foucault himself had in mind Said's book, which made a great impact, when he wrote: 'We all know that ethnology was born from colonization, which is not to say that it is an imperialist science.'[24] To make explicit singular differences is not the same as deploring the enslavement of minds, for enslavement would be a function

performed by ideologies[25] – always providing that that 'function' really does function and that man is a being sufficiently Cartesian and intellectual for it to be his intelligence that dictates his behaviour and for him only to obey his masters if he is given reasons (good or bad) to do so.[26] Far from being lying ideologies, 'discourses' map out what people really do and think, without realizing it. Foucault never did establish a cause-and-effect link working in either direction between 'discourses' and the rest of reality;[27] the set-up and the plots that unfold within it exist on the same level.

Now for the second confusion, which is to take a 'discourse' to be an infrastructure, in the Marxist sense of the word. As we have seen above, a 'discourse', which in the first instance played a heuristic role, is, so to speak, a negative notion. It stems from an observation in which, more often than not, one does not carry the description of an event or a process far enough to accede to its singularity and strangeness. Like a child, one calls all men 'Papa'. The word 'discourse' invites one to dig deeper to discover the singularity of an event; in the last analysis, it pinpoints that singularity. Nevertheless, when *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) first appeared, some readers understood the entity that Foucault called a 'discourse' to be something material, an infrastructure comparable to the forces and relations of production which, in Marx, determine political and cultural superstructures.

One concerned critic wrote that to subject the passage of history to structures or 'discourses' was to put it beyond the reach of human actions. He did not understand that a 'discourse' is in no sense something distinct that determines the evolution of history: it is simply *the fact that* every historical fact turns out to be a singularity in the eyes of a perceptive historian, something singular in both senses of the word: 'singular' because it has a bizarre form, that of a territory with 'historical frontiers' that are in no way natural or universal. A 'discourse' is the form taken by that singularity, so it is a part of this singular object, immanent in it, neither more nor less than the trace of the 'historical frontier' of an

event. And, just as the word 'landscape' can designate both a natural reality and also the picture in which a painter has reproduced that reality, similarly the word 'discourse' can usefully designate the page on which a historian retraces an event in all its singularity. In both cases, the word 'discourse' designates, not something that exists, but an abstraction: the fact that the event is singular; similarly, the functioning of an engine is not one of the parts of the machinery; it is the abstract idea that the engine functions.

Another, more emotive, critique of Foucault's thinking condemned his theory of 'discourse' for being not only mistaken but at the same time discouraging to humanity, because it turned history into an anonymous, irresponsible and deeply discouraging process. For we like to believe that only that which is encouraging can be true, 'as if hunger proved that food was in the offing'.[28] Sometimes we condemn a philosophy because it does no more than describe the world as it is, without being of any use, without inspiring us with any ideal or values. As Jean-Marie Schaeffer remarks, that love of values is motivated by 'a desire to reassure people of the plenitude of being, for they believe that plenitude is their due'.[29]

Understandably enough, then, some readers have felt a real repulsion for Foucault's brand of scepticism, which is so resolute as to seem aggressive and left-wing. But they were wrong, for in practice even the most demoralizing of theories has never demoralized anyone, not even its author: life goes on, and Schopenhauer lived on to a ripe old age, while Foucault, as a good Nietzschean, loved life and wrote of the irrepressible liberty of human beings. I will not go so far as to turn his scepticism into a philosophy with an edifying 'happy ending' (he himself chose to use it as a critique), but, as we shall discover in the end, the philosophy of this fighter did have an encouraging ending.

But that is enough preaching, so let us return to positive matters. On the subject of the 'discourse' of madness, Foucault writes that the seventeenth-century 'discourse' of insanity brought into play a whole set-up; that is to say:

> a resolutely heterogeneous combination of 'discourses', institutions, architectural edifices, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific pronouncements and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions: in short, both things that were spoken of and things that were not.[30]

This 'set-up' thus consists of laws, actions, words and practices that constitute a historical formation, whether this be a science, hospitals, sexual love or the army. The 'discourse' itself is immanent in the set-up that models itself upon it (one always makes love or war in the manner of one's own period – unless, that is, one is inventive) and that embodies it in society. The 'discourse' determines the singularity and strangeness of the period, and the local colour of the whole set-up.

In a set-up, a historian immediately spots those formations in which he is accustomed to seek for the network of intermeshed causalities that determine there will be change. Perpetual change, diversity and variability are due to the *concatenatio causarum*, this intermeshing of innovations, revolts (despite the presence of mimetism and gregariousness), mutual relations with the environment, discoveries, and rivalries between various human groups, etc.

Thinking back to the 1950s, Foucault tells us that the explanation for change 'that people suggested to me at that time and reproached me for not using did not satisfy me. It is not by referring to relations of production or the ideology of the dominant class that one can resolve this problem',[31] a problem that sets in action the various components of the set-up.[32] I am told that in this day and age, some doctors (one of whom is a member of our Ethics Committee), who are worried about the future of their art, have constantly on their lips words such as 'knowledge', 'power', the 'set-up', and they claim that these notions work well in an analysis of the threats now facing us. These threats no longer come from psychiatry or from psychoanalysis, but rather from the retreat of clinical examination in the face of machines, scanners, IMR and, above all, genetics and possibly eugenics. For

such is the present-day 'discourse'. Medical knowledge is a justification for power, power sets knowledge in action and, along with that knowledge, a whole set-up of laws, rights, regulations and practices, and it institutionalizes the whole thing, as if it constitutes the truth itself.

Knowledge, power, truth: these are the three words that so struck Foucault's readers. Let us try to see precisely how they relate to one another. In principle, knowledge is disinterested, pure of all power; a sage is the polar opposite of a politician, for whom he feels nothing but scorn. In reality, though, knowledge is often used by power, which frequently comes to its aid. Of course, it is a matter, not of setting up Knowledge and Power as some kind of infernal couple, but rather of pinpointing in every case exactly what their relations were and, first of all, whether they were related at all, and, if so, through what channels. When they are related in some way, they belong to the same set-up and help each other along, with power being knowledgeable in its own domain, and this confers a measure of power upon certain forms of knowledge.

Ever since the sixteenth century, numerous books containing advice to princes and a whole body of literature about the art of government have appeared. What exactly is Machiavelli's *The Prince*? The first lucid and amoral philosophy of power? No, it is just a handbook that sets out to teach a prince how not to lose the power that he holds over his principality.[33] For the past three centuries or more, military techniques of disciplinary training have constituted knowledge that has to be learnt and transmitted. Nowadays, government has become a veritable science: a modern prince has to be knowledgeable about the economy and so needs to consult economists and even sociologists. Western rationality (the rationality of means, not ends, of course) uses forms of technical knowledge and expertise. That knowledge and those techniques are clearly held to be trustworthy and true by those who use them and also (unless they revolt) by those who are controlled by them. So one of the components of a set-up must be truth itself. In short, Foucault tells us:

> Truth is of this world; it is produced here as a result of multiple constraints. And it possesses regular effects of power. Every society has its own regime of truth, its own general policy of truth.[34]

It would be possible to write a history of conceptions of the truth itself,[35] a history that would draw heavily on the juridical domain. Think, for example, of the medieval ordeals, which did not disappear until the twelfth century: according to whether or not one was able (or agreed) to grasp a red-hot iron bar for the time that it took to take nine paces, or to pull out an object lying in a cauldron of boiling water, one was judged by the agents of justice either to have told the truth or to have lied.[36] The historical challenge would be to show 'how certain forms of truth can be defined on the basis of penal practice'.[37] Foucault wrote a long draft for such a work,[38] which, he said, a year or two before his death, he would have liked to develop much further.

A set-up thus cheerfully intermingles things and ideas (one being that of the truth), representations, doctrines and even philosophies with institutions and social and economic practices, and so on.[39] All this is impregnated by the 'discourse' of the day. We have already noted the bizarre forms that it takes and the fact that its frontiers are more historical than natural: this entity associated with a particular time resembles a shard or a pebble more than something carefully reasoned. So let us venture to describe it, in Stoic terms, as a *materiality of incorporeals*.[40]

It is good to see Foucault, escaping from the ambiguities of the 'linguistic turn'[41] of the 1960s, expanding his doctrine to take in society ('I cannot do without society in my little books', he told me) and the whole of historical reality. It is true that, for a long time already, in Foucault's view, the best domain in which to track down the thought of a particular period was not that of the derivative forms of philosophy; the best place to discover a simple history of ideas was certainly not the canonical texts of philosophy. Even an administrative regulation could be more revealing[42] than the

Discourse on Method. The terrible fear of nuclear warfare and domination of the world by technology (or Heideggerian *Gestell*) did not result from an unfortunate remark made by Descartes on man's mastery over the world. We are by now miles away from any history of Being by Heidegger.[43]

To Kant's and Husserl's notion of a transcendental origin of thought, Foucault was to oppose an empirical and contextual one: thought, an incorporeal entity, is formed within the context of a whole 'set-up' that it impregnates and, through that 'set-up', makes its mark. For a 'discourse' rests upon, not only conscious thought, but also social classes, economic interests, norms, institutions and regulations. The appearance of a psychiatric 'discourse' in the nineteenth century involved psychological and juridical ideas, judiciary, medical, policing and hospitable institutions, and norms of both a family and a professional nature.

But now that I think about it, I see that the 'discourse' of which Foucault speaks seems close to a notion that has become a classic in sociology and history, namely, that of Max Weber's 'ideal type': a schematization of a historical formation in all its specificity. In what respect is Foucault's 'discourse' different from this? What, if not an ideal type, is his description of, or 'discourse' on, the amorous 'pleasures' of Greece? What is his 'governmentalism of the *ancien régime*'? Foucault certainly did construct an ideal type when he argued that, prior to the eighteenth century, the government of human beings consisted in:

> reintroducing into even the behaviour of subjects the rules that God imposed upon them, or that were rendered necessary by the flaws in human nature; then, with the Age of Enlightenment and the Physiocrats, governing came to consist in controlling natural currents (demography, money, the free circulation of grain . . .) and, apart from that, in '*laisser faire, laisser passer*, letting things ride'.[44]

Those are particularly profound ideal types that attempt to reach the *differentia ultima*. But for Foucault, as for

Weber, it was a matter of distinguishing the components of any historical formation, any set-up, finding the links between their components and revealing the singularity of everything. So why was Foucault so adamant in insisting[45] that he was not at all close to Weber? Because, in Weber's thought, he found no recognition of the principle of singularity and he believed that what Weber was looking for were essences. I am sorry to say that his idea of Weber was incorrect.[46] He did not see that Weber was just as nominalist as he himself was. Weber had read Nietzsche, shared his haughty scepticism, and perceived that the heaven of human beings was 'rent apart between the gods', or between different values.

Finally, since a 'discourse' is immanent in historical facts and in any set-up of which it is, itself, the ultimate formulation, it does not carry history along with it, rather it is carried along by history, together with its inseparable set-up. That is the answer to a question that is often asked: what is the origin of this so-called 'blind' determination constituted by the 'discourse'? What produces it? What sets off the mysterious mutations of 'discourse' through the centuries? They stem, quite simply, from the ordinary and well-known historical causality that never ceases to sweep along and modify practices, thoughts, customs and institutions – in short, the whole set-up, together with the 'discourses' that simply mark out its frontiers. I have already alluded to the 'discourse' of pagan 'pleasures' and subsequently of Christian 'flesh'. I imagine that its components included many things: Platonicism, Stoicism, the doctrine said to be 'good in every respect' (which recommended it to the prominent class of citizens and leaders), the democratic or oligarchic civic code of the ancient city and its self-interested duty of self-control, the idea of *physis*, nature, which then became a divine creation, and so on and so forth.

As we have seen, a set-up, a finite entity, is bounded by the historical frontiers of its 'discourse'. So we are bound to conclude that what our sceptical thinker, Foucault, says about the history of knowledge must also apply to history in general:

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> The history of science, the history of knowledge does not simply obey the general law of the progress of reason. It is not human consciousness or human reason that somehow dictates the laws of history.[47]

And given that 'discourses' do not succeed one another in accordance with any dialectical logic, they do not supplant one another for any good reasons, and they are not judged by some transcendental court, but are only related by what is the case, rather than what should be the case, they supplant one another and their relations are those of strangers, or rivals. Thought thrives on conflict, not reason.[48]

3

Foucault's Scepticism

Once one manages to make explicit these dated and explicable events that are constituted by the *ultima differentia* known as 'discourses', one's readers are led to draw critical conclusions. The successive 'discourses', which are products of a history and are also reflections which do not correspond to the reality of their objects, differ from one century to another – a fact that suffices to indicate that non-correspondence. As soon as one makes a 'discourse' explicit, its arbitrary and limited nature becomes apparent. On the basis of this sample and this numerically singular judgement, we then presume, passing a 'collective' (general, if not universal) judgement, that the same must apply to any other 'discourse'. Making explicit just a few singularities thus leads, by induction, to a critique of knowledge and the world as it is.

Note that I did not say 'leads to a negation of empirical truths' (a point to which we shall be returning). Nevertheless, when one does manage to make explicit these dated singularities that we are calling 'discourses', one ends up, albeit without saying so, with philosophical conclusions. For that reason, Foucault said that he was not a historian; but as he was careful to leave those implicit conclusions unsaid, he did not call himself a philosopher either. In the year of

his death, he described his books as 'a critical history of thought':[1] a 'history' because it did not proceed *modo philosophico*; 'A piece of empirical research, some fragment of history' has the right to 'challenge the transcendental dimension'.[2]

Foucault's scepticism thus constitutes a critique in both senses of the word. In the sense that the word held for Kant, it is a critique of knowledge that, here, functions on the basis of historical hermeneutics, not Newtonian physics, as Kant's critique does. It is of interest to both philosophers and historians and is based on what the author of *Salammbo*, in 1859, called 'a sense of history': this was 'something utterly new and the glory of our age', Flaubert claimed in a letter dated 1859.[3] But a historical critique of this kind may also concern people and citizens and, for those who choose to be militant, may serve as a political critique that promotes action. (According to Foucault, this is a matter of a purely personal choice, for that choice could not be prescribed by any Reason, Good, or Sense of history.)

For example, if one produces a historical critique of the idea of Power in general, one realizes that, in truth, in some periods, it was possible for men to be citizens, each one of whom was both a citizen-soldier and a small part of the government of his own city;[4] in another period, a man would simply be part of the human fauna that peopled the prince's domain, fauna that the prince could fleece so long as he knew, thanks to Machiavelli's advice, how to remain master;[5] in yet another period, a man would be a member of a population that the authorities with power undertook to manage, in the same way as a conservationist of water and forests regulates and channels the waxing and waning of both water and trees; or, in other circumstances, a man might be travelling on a cruise-ship, sailing sometimes through stormy waters, with the ship's authorities watching over the welfare of the passengers.

A calm, informed, contemplative critique thus causes one to doubt the truth of general comments about Power or Love (with capital letters). One may then move on to an active

critique which, because it recognizes the changing realities behind such deceptive generalities, challenges their political legitimacy. Another possibility is to arrive at the opposite conclusion, as Montaigne did, and ask oneself whether there is really any point in seeking a change in government. To do so must, I repeat, be a personal decision, for the new system of government will be just as arbitrary as the last one – not that this is a consideration that has ever stopped anyone from going ahead. That is the way life is, whether or not nihilism is involved.

Foucault, for whom the past constituted a cemetery of truths, for all that never reached the bitter conclusion that all is vanity; instead, he believed in the positive nature of becoming: what right has anyone to pass judgement on it? Foucault never, even with a stray word, condemned even the most absurd of doctrines; he describes them all with a serenity and generosity that constitute a form of respect. Nothing is vain, the products of the human mind are nothing but positive, since they have existed; they are interesting and as remarkable as the products of Nature, the flowers and animals that show what the latter is capable of. I can still hear Foucault talking to me, with pleasure, sympathy and respectful admiration, about St Augustine and his constant flow of ideas: ideas clearly all the more admirable in that, being hard to believe, they indicate just how far the human mind is capable of venturing.

His was no superficial aestheticism, but a deeply rooted attitude. Nor was it amoralistic. The appalling agony of Damiens was horrible, as goes without saying, for the facts speak for themselves. (Foucault describes this incident of torture in his *Discipline and Punish*.) Likewise, Flaubert's objectivity in the face of the Carthaginian atrocities condemns them simply by not dwelling on them; likewise, in the case of Jonathan Littell whose novel, written in French and entitled *Les Bienveillantes* (the American translation is entitled *The Kindly Ones*), has a startling Caravaggesque impact. Behind the rhetorical silence of the writing, one senses a bitterness that Foucault, in conversation, expressed with the

usual words that rise to our lips in the face of the atrocities of which the human race is capable.[6]

Foucault was neither a nihilist nor a subjectivist, not a relativist, not a historicist. He was, as he himself acknowledged, a sceptic; which brings me to a striking quotation that says it all. Twenty-five days before his death, Foucault summed up his thought in a single word. An acute interviewer asked him, 'Given that you recognize no universal truths, are you a sceptic?' 'Absolutely,' Foucault replied.[7] That is it, in a word: Foucault doubted all over-general truths, all our great timeless truths: neither more nor less. As he wrote at the beginning of *Naissance de la biopolitique* (*The Birth of Biopolitics*), universals do not exist; only singularities do. One evening, when we were speaking of myth, he told me that, for Heidegger, the great question was to know 'what is the basis of truth?'; for Wittgenstein, it was knowing what we are saying when we tell the truth; 'but, in my opinion, the question is: how is it that the truth is so untrue?' – truth, or at least the great truths of every age.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault does not suggest that our penal system is no better than the atrocious tortures of the *ancien régime*. He is not so cynical as to lump everything together (after all, he did demonstrate against the death penalty); but he does want to show that the two penal systems are heterogeneous and that their respective objectives are equally singular and arbitrary. He immediately sensed something strange, at once perceived a difference. A difference from what? From other 'discourses' or from our own penal 'discourse'. In relation to what else could we gauge a difference? There is no ready-made typology of human behaviour to which we can resort; nor will there ever be.

History has thrown up a succession of 'discourses' and set-ups associated with madness, yet it is not possible to deduce from them what madness itself is. However, those 'discourses' and set-ups constitute historical facts that we, as historians, can discuss with a certain rigour. Allow me, at

this point, to evoke Spinoza, for whom every body, every soul and every thought is a singular product of the universal concatenation and belongs to no species or *genus*, or, rather, only appears to belong in imaginations, which are misled by superficial resemblances[8] (although it is true that Spinoza was talking about modes of the substance of Nature, that is to say beings like you or me, and not about entities such as 'discourses', as Foucault does).

The consequences of this are weighty: we can no longer pronounce upon the true course for humanity to follow or the meaning of its history, and we must accustom ourselves to the idea that the convictions that we cherish today will not be those of tomorrow. We have to give up general and definitive truths: metaphysics, philosophical anthropology and moral and political philosophy are all vain speculations. The Absolute is not within our grasp,[9] at least not at present. There may come a day when we shall know everything: according to Victor Hugo, the tomb is made for knowledge. To a sceptic, it is not impossible that the world may be very different from what we can see of it.

Let me hasten to reassure my readers: this scepticism does not affect the reality of historical facts, the facts that fill Foucault's books; what it does affect are big questions such as 'What is true democracy?' But why should we care what true democracy is? So long as we know how we want it to be (and, in any case, most of us probably think that it truly is what we want it to be). To criticize generalizations is not to deny all truth and snipe at the honour of historians, as some have feared.

Nevertheless, the consequences remain weighty. Let me remind you of the weightiest of all by evoking the scandal that Foucault raised on the day when he stated (or was believed to have stated) that man, humanity or the human figure deserved only to be wiped from our minds and never spoken of again. But that was all a storm in a teacup. I repeat, the truth of empirical facts is accessible to us; we have constructed linguistics, a political economy, sociology and even psychology and the cognitive sciences; but we cannot

construct a philosophical anthropology. That's all. I imagine that the reader can imagine what comes next.

A sceptic yet not an enemy of the human race!

What can be said about humanity in general, apart from platitudes? In anthropological universals, one never finds what one British epistemologist has called 'the hard centre of softness': everything is malleable. Do you wonder how knowledge and science came to develop? Feel free to invoke curiosity, the need to control or appropriate the world by means of knowledge, fear of the unknown, reactions in the face of the threat of indifferentiation.[10] Hence one of Foucault's principal theses: 'We must do without mankind and human nature if we wish to analyse the system of society and human beings';[11] we must study history, economics, society, linguistics and the whole set-up that makes human beings what they are at a precise moment.

Whereas anthropological thinking assumes that over and above the facts lies a human generality, the human sciences, linguistics, economics and ethnology each study one specific domain, without presuming thereby to contribute to a general conception of a human being.[12] There is much to be said about the positivities that are constantly at work forming human beings and about *homo economicus*, *homo faber* and *homo loquens*, but is there anything instructive to be said about *homo* pure and simple? That laughter is one of his properties? That he is not altogether good and not altogether bad? That he is a wonderfully diverse and ever-changing subject and that it is risky to pass any constant and uniform judgement on him? There is no 'nature' to be discovered in a human being reduced to himself, for he is no more than the set-ups in which he is momentarily caught.[13]

It is thus possible to predict that people will soon cease to fasten upon 'human nature' as the object of their study and 'man, [as such,] will be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea'. That fatal sentence with which *Les*

mots et les choses (*The Order of Things*) ends is well known, as is the clamour of frogs in the mud that greeted this conclusion, despite the fact that its context rendered it both comprehensible and innocuous. What a storm of virtuous indignation was prompted by that phrase, which conferred upon Foucault the reputation of an enemy of the human race, the race to which so many of his readers belonged! With the passing of time, people have forgotten that in those distant years, in the aftermath of the horrors of war, everyone was a humanist; and there were many kinds of humanisms: classical, progressivist, Christian, Marxist, personalist, existentialist, Thomist and even Stalinist.

In that much maligned sentence, a fair-minded reader will detect not so much a blasphemy, but rather, forcefully incised with an elegant etcher's needle, a metaphysical sense of the tragic aspect of life. Three centuries ago, that image of a face drawn in the sand and washed out by the sea would have been interpreted as an allegory of the 'vanities' of the human condition, a Melancholia. But it was now assumed that Foucault 'was out to be provocative', so was no more than a *provocateur*. That word is certainly a misnomer, for Foucault was not a provocative person, rather one bent on challenging error and stupidity. The psychology of provocation tends to be used as an explanation in an all too facile fashion. It would be just as easy to appeal to the psychology of naive belief in provocation – belief that might be either naive or vain, for a bourgeois of 1925 was flattered by the idea that 'cubist painters' were sufficiently concerned about him to have no other aim than to shock him. In truth, whoever believes himself the subject of provocation is, *ipso facto*, not worth provoking.

Foucault's fatal phrase meant simply that it is possible to say what *makes* a man,[14] but not possible to discover what is 'a man's being', as Heidegger tries to (e.g., 'What is man's place in Everything and in time?'), or what he is internally, as Sartre does (e.g., 'Is he a person of good faith or bad faith?'). In 1971, Foucault was, in fact, even more right than he thought he was for, as he was to discover around 1980:

> in the course of their history, human beings have constantly been constructing themselves, that is to say they have continually been shifting their subjectivity, fitting themselves into an infinite and multiple series of different subjectivities that go on forever and will never bring us face to face with what man is.[15]

From then on, Foucault was to fill the place left empty by 'man', that hero of so many proverbs, by installing in his stead a process of constitution or, at other times, an act of self-stylization on the part of a free, if not all-powerful, human Subject. We shall return, later, to this idea.

All the same, it is not hard to guess at the cause of this little scandal: Foucault's fatal phrase had prompted a black beam of mistrust that he attracted by his style of writing and his attitude as a writer. His incisive books are not the works of a rebel; but nor are they addressed solely to supporters; and nor do they aim to attract readers of every kind to them, as a warm stove gathers people around it. They are not communicative or of a kind to raise the vital tonicity of their readers. They were written with the point of a sword or sabre by a samurai as hard as silex, with boundless sangfroid and self-sufficiency. The works are themselves swords wielded with a dexterity that assumes the reader himself possesses the requisite vital tonicity. The virtuosity of this fencing style delighted readers still young at heart, and ensured success for Foucault's books, whether or not they were understood. But at the same time, and whether or not understood, they forced other readers on to the defensive or even repelled them when his style alerted them to what kind of a man and what attitudes they were dealing with.

I have called him a samurai (and am indebted to Jean-Claude Passeron for suggesting this word that so well conveys the slight, elegant figure of our hero, if not his great bursts of laughter). And a samurai, a warrior, is not of a negative turn of mind. Foucault was not one of those bitter pessimists who dream of blowing up the planet. And he criticized as facile and suspect the literature of essayists and sociologists

who cultivate the genre of the Latin satire to lambaste the vices of the day: bread and circuses, a society addicted to spectacles, consumerism and merchandise (such platitudes are hard to avoid as it is virtually impossible to construct a serious anthropology of the present day).

What had been red-hot at the time of the surrealists is now hardly more than reheated fare. As a historian, Foucault had no time for such whining exaggerations. The Nietzschean that he was detected a symptom of ill health in such complacent complaints. For his own part, he rejected satiation, disgust, lassitude and decline (and that is the message of the Nietzschean myth of the Eternal Return: 'I am happy to relive the world as it is, as many times as you like').

The limits of Foucault's scepticism

I now hasten to reply to a very different objection that is constantly raised but is nothing more than a Sophistic quibble. It is sometimes claimed that Foucault contradicts himself when he asserts that the truth is there is no truth; he is carried away by his scepticism and this leads to his doubting doubt itself. But that is not so, for his scepticism does not doubt everything as a matter of principle. And this is enough to rebut that objection, which sophistically confuses a universal judgement with a collective judgement that considers the facts one by one. When a thinker casts doubt upon general ideas, he is not passing a universal judgement (for, if that were the case, he would be swept up in his own condemnation). Rather, his judgement is a numerically collective one: he does not know in advance, as a matter of principle, that there are no general truths, but he has made a critical balance-sheet of the shop of truths and has noticed that all the samples he has examined deserved criticism; this leads him to conclude that everything in the shop may be open to criticism. Now, the realization that the elements of the balance-sheet, assessed one by one, are in ruins does not mean that the gloomy balance-sheet itself is ruined; on the

contrary, it confirms it: for the balance-sheet and the shop are two different things, even if the balance-sheet is certainly shattering.

Nor is it self-contradictory if, having denied the truth of generalizations, he proceeds to a general critique. This sober critique does not claim that one's understanding corresponds perfectly to any determinate object; all it needs to work with are empty notions such as 'discourses', an object, referents, principles, collective judgements, singularities and universals; and these empty shells are no more than aids to thinking that neither correspond nor do not correspond to an object,[16] since they do not correspond to any determinate object that is inseparable from a particular 'discourse'. However, they do lend themselves, one by one, to a whole crowd of singular referents,[17] the 'discourse' on which can be made explicit by a genealogical critique; and this in its turn leads to the demystification achieved by the balance-sheet mentioned above.

Leave little facts in peace, but make war on generalizations. As Foucault, this unexpected positivist, vouchsafes no more on this score, let me chance my arm. Of course, as Marc Bloch points out, historical facts do not exist ready-made; they are constructions. But they are constructions built on 'discourses' that are neutral with regard to their truth. The tiny fact that, in some periods and some places, a haircut would be paid for with a dozen eggs rather than with money, in the twentieth century becomes an economic fact worthy of historical discourse. In the seventeenth century, the resurrection of Lazarus and the witches' sabbath both ceased to be credible supernatural events (on the other hand, as we know from Pierre Janet, the famous clinician,[18] the stigmata of, for example, St Francis of Assisi were not deemed to be mere legend). Judgements passed on empirical facts can be true: the Cambodian genocide did take place; and Jesus of Nazareth did truly exist; but did he really walk on the water? And has any miracle ever been proved?

On the other hand, in order to turn Hitler's genocide into an untrue legend, as a handful of perverts claim it to be,

there would have to be a whole 'discourse' according to which our world (like that of the gnostics, long ago) would be dominated and abused by lying powers such as imperialism, capitalism or a Jewish plot – powers with an interest in fabricating that legend. Six million Jews murdered: that is a fact, and facts are stubborn, as Foucault retorted in an argument about the crimes of the Stalinist period.[19] In contrast, figures cited in the Old Testament are misleadingly inflated: for example, a hundred thousand enemies killed, not counting the women and small children. But then we no longer live in an age of legends and hyperbolic figures.

One may argue about how to interpret the genocide. (The universal banality of evil? The tragic consequence of a German *Sonderweg*? Civic and military docility under the authorities, the all too famous *Obrigkeit*?) As we shall see, there was to be a scientific discussion about it, with ideal types elaborated: but the fact of the genocide is there, day after day, and only a gnostic 'discourse' could deny it.

Things are now becoming clearer, as we come to the nub or principle of our problem; and so far all we have done is continue in the line of one of the great trends of Greek thought. On the one hand, there are facts, the little facts of daily life, the only ones that the Greek Sceptics did not doubt, which only goes to show that life wins out (the first of the Sceptics, Pyrrho, was afraid of dogs, for he knew that they were capable of biting).[20] On the other hand, there is all the rest, a huge inflated mass of 'truths' destined for the cemetery. Nevertheless, we should make room for the discoveries of the physical sciences and for the ideal types of historians and sociologists, just as the sceptic Sextus Empiricus made room for empirical medicine. For the fact is that scientific discoveries and ideal types are upheld by facts similar to those whose reality we sense as we take action or are affected by the actions of others. These are facts that both animals and we ourselves have to cope with.

Inferences based on these facts enable us to know of the existence of past facts and more or less to foresee the future. In a critique, 'historical' events, in all their pomposity,

crumble away into everyday facts and actions (think of Waterloo, seen through the eyes of Fabrice del Dongo, who wonders whether the episodes of fighting in which he has taken part were really a battle). It is thus possible to establish the material reality of what has happened and what went on around the gas chambers. Furthermore, we do understand one another, sometimes well, sometimes not so well. We are linked hermeneutically. That is how it is that, in default of metaphysical speculations on Reason, we really can decipher nature, recount history and describe society. Hume would probably have approved of this philosophy of simple understanding.

That being said, these little facts that are beyond doubt can only ever be reached according to a particular point of view and through a 'discourse'. That is an inevitability that weighs heavily upon human knowledge.[21] A herbivorous creature looks for grass, that singular object that repeats itself indefinitely – for a thing that is singular may nevertheless be repeatable numerically[22] – but that grass is not Grass per se, in itself, independent of any point of view. In the eyes of the grazing animal, it is green stems that shoot out of the ground. From a bovine point of view, that constitutes the 'discourse' on grass, 'discourse' that is different from and no less partial (in both senses) than that of a botanist or a hiker. What Grass in itself is, beyond any point of view, is something that we shall never know (the words do not even have any sense for us; only a divine intelligence could descry the geometrical form of grass). The 'discourse' of botanists who think they 'know all there is to know' about grass does not correspond to the 'discourse' of a herbivore. We have no way of knowing what grass, power or sex might be unless they are draped in a 'discourse'. We cannot extract or 'unearth' facts from the vice in which they are held by their 'discourse'. This is neither relativism nor historicism; it is perspectivism.

Or, to cite something that I know Foucault said somewhere or other: nowhere does one find sexuality 'in its wild state'; it is a plant that can only be found in a state of cul-

tivation, within a 'discourse', for the plant is both the prisoner and the jailer of a set-up in which the 'discourse', that ephemeral a priori, is immanent. (Here, it is clearly not a matter of anything resembling Kant's a priori forms of sensibility!) All I am trying to suggest, as well as I can, is that we do not see anything 'without forming some idea of it'. Faced with a newcomer, a child will say, 'It's a papa', for that is his anthropological 'discourse'. We never find ourselves faced with 'some primitive, fundamental, deaf, scarcely articulated experience',[23] an object prior to all 'discourse', a prediscursive referent. Any such enigmatic form would immediately take on a meaning, a name, even if this were simply that of an Enigma.

I therefore assume, rightly or wrongly,[24] that, according to Foucault, we always interpret things; we do that instantly but do not continue for long to interpret them in the same way.[25] An adult male is instantly identified as a papa, but only for a few months more. Research into a naked object, a prediscursive referent, may not be impossible[26] but would not lead very far: human beings never do have to cope with a naked referent. A phenomenon that affects society and history according to how it is lived through, suffered, tolerated, praised or institutionalized has always been interpreted instantly, to become part of a whole set-up that is based on that interpretation.

Only a god could understand what a prediscursive form of madness was or what Grass, in itself, is.[27] As the perceptive Jean-Marie Schaeffer has been kind enough to point out to me: 'What is understanding if not an interaction between two spatio-temporal realities, namely an individual and his or her environment? Which means that it is an empirical process, not a mirror.' There could only be a correspondence to the truth, a mirror or a pure shaft of enlightenment if a transcendental or transcendent foundation (the kind of guarantee provided by the existence of God) miraculously ensured that this could happen. That was a miracle in which philosophy believed up until Nietzsche (although Carneades does provide an example of scepticism in the ancient world).

Unfortunately, no 'discourse' can fill that sublime role for, 'given that different "discourses" may all be equally powerful', as Schaeffer went on to say, 'only a superior order of "discourse", one incommensurable with human "discourses", could operate such an abstraction'.

Jean-Marie Schaeffer's letter to me then went on as follows:

> Foucault's epistemological attitude did not consist in reducing reality to 'discourse', but in pointing out that once a reality is stated, it is always already structured discursively. In this sense, his affirmation of the irreducible diversity of the 'discourses' used implied neither any idealism that reduced reality to thought nor any ontological relativism.

On the contrary, I would add, a historian has access to events and a physician gets to apply technology and make predictions. But nothing more, for 'one cannot separate the modality of accession from that to which it offers access'.

When we weigh up a 'discourse', we do have a sense of the reality of the dark nugget that it enfolds[28] (and also perhaps of the power that is exercised upon us by the whole social, institutional, customary and theoretical etc. set-up in which the 'discourse' is immanent); but it is not possible for us to sift out the grain from the chaff, for the 'discourse' carves up that nugget that is its object and remodels it on itself. Everything will depend upon which particular 'discourse' we use in our determination to understand. Three types can be distinguished: the human sciences in so far as they limit themselves to extracting the ideal type from a series of singular cases; the physical sciences that have discovered certain regularities; and, finally, theoretical attempts to handle generalizations that embrace too much and cling to it too closely.

The history of thought detects no transcendental moment in all this,[29] any more than political and social history reveals an immanent meaning in history. It is quite legitimate to amuse oneself by imagining Foucault as a metaphysician (even if such a concept is impossible);[30] such a Foucault

would have regarded as substance not the necessary nature-god of Spinoza, but instead chaos, the 'chaos of precision' of which René Char speaks. Chaos would have produced solely *res singulares* and no universals at all, which is why Foucault does not reckon the mind to be capable of general truths, which are bound to be hollow.

And had Foucault been an ontologist, for him being would have been reduced to a succession of discursive practices of knowledge, set-ups of power and forms of subjectivization, all of which are 'discontinuous procedures the basis of which can only be indetermination', as François Wahl has observed.[31] Let readers who regret the absence of a transcendent Being rest assured: belief is a fact or a gift that needs no proofs; and meanwhile an unbeliever, if he is a sceptic, can argue neither for nor against God. Montaigne's conclusion, in the interests of public peace, was that all one could do is continue quietly to believe as before.

But let us come back down to earth. In the physical nature that the exact sciences examine, the objects of scientific 'discourse' display regularities, as we all know. However, in human affairs, there are and can only be transient singularities (pleasures, flesh, etc.) since, in its becoming, humanity lacks any foundation, vocation or dialectic to set it in order: every period presents nothing but a chaos of arbitrary singularities, the products of the chaotic concatenation of the preceding period. I think the above sentence sums up the principle upon which Foucauldism is based. That is why Foucault was able to tell his interviewers that, in the human domain, he could not assert any universal truths. There were only truths of details. However, Foucault himself never did identify with that principle, because for him what was important was not that truism itself, but the facts that stemmed from it. He wanted to make it clear that his research took facts as its starting point, not some philosophical principle that he had no desire to discuss philosophically, since he did not believe in philosophy.

Empirical singularities did, on the other hand, seem to him worthy of belief. They present a historian, journalist or

enquirer with his or her only opportunity: for an investigation into them will throw light on the singular unfolding of a particular event. Thus, the 'discourse' that these investigators fling over the facts, in order to capture them, is 'discourse' that remodels them, catching in its nets a remodelled response that answers their question, which is: what is the truth of this singular fact, what happened in reality? (To be honest, that question is only viable if the fact in question is not supernatural and if it has occurred in our own space and time, not on Olympus, both a heaven and a mountain summit, or in any mythical space-time.)

Above all, when and where did the fact happen? As Bernard Williams has shown,[32] our historical science begins with Thucydides, who gives every event a place and a date, *illic et tunc*; for the historical past had become homogeneous with the present[33] and was no longer a mythological time or one in which animals had the power of speech. Later, histories would perhaps raise more general and thorny questions such as the role of the class struggle, the economy as a prime mover, and the clash of civilizations, but all that is another matter. It is true that such questions of historical 'synthesis' can change the meaning that a historian ascribes to an event, but they must never obscure the reality of the fact.

And there's another thing: by raising the question of the *illic et nunc*, one becomes a historian oneself, rather than a theorist who is either an honest believer or a militant who is fooling himself. Raising that question involves 'the correlative constitution of both subject and object'.[34] For if a knowledgeable subject asks the past the right question, that subject thereby sets himself up as a historian or an investigative journalist. The questioning 'discourse', the object that it buries and manipulates, and the knowledgeable subject himself, all three take shape from the same questioning process. Each chooses its path and subjectivization freely (there will be more to say about that adverb, 'freely', which may alarm sociologists).

We shall, all in good time, be coming back to that; but right now let us return to Foucault's tacit principle. While

all is well for empirical singularities, in contrast, by virtue of the same principle, a general idea, which planes above and presumes to subsume a number of singular realities that it then confuses together, is bound to be superficial and misleading. If one seeks out generalities in human affairs – concepts or an essence that is common to one of those 'tangled pluralities of objects'[35] – one only ends up with ideas that are false, unclear (wide in extension but short on understanding), too vast, frequently noble but sometimes at once edifying yet pompous. But let us now see how Foucault managed, without contradiction, to fight for his convictions or, rather, his indignations.

4

Archaeology

Origins are seldom beautiful, for our thoughts do not go back to some subject upon which truth is founded, or to some primal complicity with the fresh reality of the world; instead, they stem from chance events. Hence 'the principle of singularity in the history of thought'.[1] Power, the class struggle, monotheism, the Good, liberalism, socialism – all the great ideas in which we believe or have believed – are products of our past. They exist and are real in the sense that some of them have been imposed on us as notions that should be believed and obeyed; but that does not mean they were founded upon the truth. Foucault agrees with the spontaneous nominalism of historians[2] or of Max Weber.

Concepts should be swept away. Foucault remembers Nietzsche's remark, 'All concepts have come to be'; and so he proposes to 'circle around anthropological universals as much as possible, in order to investigate their historical constitution',[3] and to dig into the archives of humanity in order to discover the complicated but humble origins of our lofty convictions. With 'genealogy' as a heading, itself borrowed from Nietzsche, that is exactly what his books have done. Foucault's *Naissance de la prison* (*The Birth of the Prison*) echoes Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*.

If concepts have come to be, then so have realities. They have emerged out of the same human chaos. So they do not stem from any origin, but have been formed by epigenesis, by additions and modifications, not from any pre-formation. They do not grow naturally as plants do, developing something that pre-existed in a seed. Instead, they have constituted themselves in the course of time, by unpredictable degrees, bifurcations and accidents, and through encounters with other series of chance events; and the way that they end up is equally unpredictable.[4] There is no prime mover behind historical causality[5] (the economy is not the supreme cause that governs all the rest; nor is society); everything acts upon everything else and everything reacts against everything else.

As a consequence of these discontinuities, the questions that we ask about reality differ from one period to another, as much as do the answers that we find. Different 'discourses' respond to different questions. Each time, we apprehend a reality that is no longer the same. The object of our knowledge does not remain the same from one 'discourse' to another.[6] To cite Rorty, was Aristotle mistaken when he distinguished between two kinds of movement in nature, the one natural (the movement of the stars, for example), the other forced (the passage of a hurled javelin)? Did Newton reply correctly to the questions to which Aristotle had responded wrongly? Or were they asking different questions?[7] Similarly, it is ridiculous and hardly philosophical to smile at the illusions of lovers, since the loved one seen through the eyes of love is not the same as that object seen by eyes that are indifferent.

As a result, 'the mode of objectivization varies according to the type of knowledge involved'.[8] Dare I refer to Wittgenstein at this point? What he and Foucault share in common is a belief solely in singularities, a rejection of truth as an *adequatio mentis et rei*, and a conviction that something in us ('discourse' or, according to Wittgenstein, language) has more to say about things than we ourselves have. For Wittgenstein, life depends upon linguistic games from which it cannot escape; we think through words, codes of conduct

(social or political relations, magic, attitudes to the arts, etc.).[9] Each language game has a 'truth' of its own, that is to say that it stems from a norm that makes it possible to distinguish between what it is admissible and what it is inadmissible to say about it. Every period lives off its received ideas (or its received expressions) and ours is no exception.[10]

The same thing may be targeted by a number of games in each of which it appears to be different; there are a number of possible modes of objectivization. The tree mentioned in a Greek myth that recounts how Apollo changed Daphne into a bay tree is not the same as the bay tree of a botanist; nor is it the same as the bay tree that Greek gardeners talked about and cultivated. The narrator of the myth of Daphne was not even aware that his language was different from that of a gardener or that the bay tree in the myth was not the same as other bay trees.[11] In 1984, the year of his death, Foucault, to differentiate himself from Wittgenstein, defined his *oeuvre* as a study of what he called, not language-games, but truth-games.[12] Nevertheless, for him as for Wittgenstein, the bay tree, the object of knowledge, and the subject, the mythologist or the gardener, were not the same 'in that, for the one, the knowledge in question took the form of an exegesis of a sacred text, while for the other it was an observation about nature'.[13]

Despite our desire to be 'objective', any change in knowledge, however well intended, involves a change in its object and is introduced at the cost of a new 'discourse' on the object.[14] As will be remembered, Laennec *saw* a different human body from that seen by his predecessors who regarded it as an unintelligible scrawl of signs. In the creation of a comparative grammar of Indo-European or Romance languages, it was not enough to note that the Greek *meter*, the Latin *mater*, the German *mutter*, and the Indo-Iranian *matar* were very similar: it was also necessary to attach importance to the matter of the words, their vowels and their consonants. It was necessary to recognize that words cannot be reduced to their meaning, to their function as mirrors. Their

sonorous matter was more than just a detail, a coarse grain in the verbal photography of things.

There now developed a whole science devoted to discovering the laws that had changed the sounds of a Sanskrit word into those of a Greek word, the meaning of which might be different, or to defining the stages through which the Latin *aqua* passed before becoming *eau* in French. Better still, in the course of doing this, it had been discovered that in the midst of the universal chaos, a particular aspect of words – their phenomes – proffered constants and the possibility of formulating laws; 'discursive and discontinuous series, each, within limits, possess a regularity'.[15] Galileo and Newton made analogous discoveries in the domain of physics.

The etymologies suggested with superb casualness in the *Cratylus* now seemed puerile.[16] The birth of comparative grammar not only promoted better understanding of one's object, but also implied that basically one was no longer talking about the same thing, for 'the part of the thing considered to be relevant' had changed.[17] Since the same objective kernel is each time perceived partially and differently and never completely or in all its nakedness, knowledge is characterized by a certain 'rarity', in the Latin sense of the word: it is lacunose, sparse and never sees all that there is to see. 'My problem', Foucault declared, 'could be put as follows: how is it that in a particular period one can say one thing but another is never said?'[18] What could be thought, seen and said at a particular time, within a particular domain, is 'rare', a shapeless island amid an infinite void.

Human beings can never accede to the whole truth, for it exists nowhere. We are not capable of receiving the Word from some immense, definitive and total 'Discourse' that might wish to make itself heard[19] and be waiting for the right moment in the void that surrounds us; such as the 'discourse' of those who are excluded, according to Michel de Certeau's over-charitable view in May 1968. The void surrounding us is not full of all that we have rejected.[20] There is no natural entity that has been ejected and wishes to gallop back to us. There is no such thing as a Hegelian parturition of what has

been denied, of what is negated, which would, little by little, lead to total truth and the end/goal of history. To put that another way, there is no dialectic, no perpetual sparring dialogue between received ideas and ideas that have been excluded, no return for what has been repressed.[21] In the immense void, our petty thinking seems very patchy, very misshapen and full of surprising gaps. It does not fill out an ideal sphere harmoniously; and many different thoughts would be just as conceivable as those which we do produce, which are no more necessary than those which we do not.

5

Universalism, Universals, Epigenesis: The Beginnings of Christianity

In short, the Truth will never come down to us from heaven. And we should be wary of anthropological universals and of big words such as 'individualism' or even 'universalism'. Here is an example that leaps to mind: the beginnings of Christianity, upon which I shall venture to dwell because, in the course of studying this, we shall encounter further methodological problems. As is well known, this religion grew out of Judaism, which was the exclusive religion of the only Chosen People. Then, having opened its ranks to the huge pagan crowds that surrounded it, it became universal. It is conventional to regard it as one of the great stages of universal history and a general leap forward for the Spirit.

An opening to universality: but in what sense? That could mean so many things . . . In the case under consideration, it means that Christianity is the only true religion and must be preached to all men, for their salvation, for each one of them possesses an immortal soul. That is why, in the United States of America, prior to 1865, the owners of slaves baptized their blacks who arrived from Africa. But their narrow universalism did not cover human rights. Nor did they believe that there was but one human race and that negroes were people like themselves, with free bodies and

mental capacities virtually identical to those of whites, with any differences accounted for solely by the social and cultural *habitus*.

Well, but could one not hope that, through this narrow religious opening, a great idea, along with Christ, made its entrance into the world? No, for this was not an intrusion of Spirit, an *Ereignis* or Event that Heidegger (who was not sympathetic to evangelism) did not think of. Rather, it was a human reaction that originated down here, in this world, and was immanent in our daily human condition. The first Christians became universalists only in the narrow sense of the word and without deliberately deciding to.

So what is the explanation for Christian proselytism? How was it that the Good News was preached to the whole world? After all, Jesus of Nazareth was only a Jewish prophet and we do not know what he would have thought of Christianity, which took shape only after his death. Jesus the prophet was not his own hero (he spoke in the name of his heavenly Father). But, fascinated by his charisma, between AD 40 and 100, his disciples and preachers constructed a religion in which he was the hero.

Each did so in his own fashion. Christianity was their collective creation, as is proved by the fact that each exalted Christ in his own way. Was Jesus the Messiah? The first-born of all creatures? Uncreated? Was he divine from the start or did he only become the Son of God following his Resurrection (St Paul taught both doctrines)? In the Gospel of St John, Jesus was the incarnation of a personified and deified abstraction: the eternal Word of God, a divine being and hence 'a god, alongside God in person'. In 140, for the numerous readers of Hermas, Jesus was the Holy Spirit within a human body.

On one point all were agreed. Christ, who had presented himself to the apostles as the prophet of the End of Time, had been allotted a cosmic role by his Father and soon would return amid clouds of glory, to pass judgement on both the living and the dead. But the apostles, in their grief, exalted to the stars the uneven but mutual relationship of

passionate love that had bound them to this cosmic being. It was also thought that, on the Cross, he had 'given his life as a ransom for many';[1] this made his lamentable end meaningful.

Christianity was thus to be a religion unlike any other and that fitted no typology. To classify it among the 'religions of salvation' is not helpful; like literary inventiveness, religious inventiveness is capable of creations that are altogether unique.

The stroke of genius was that invention of a man-God, a man like the rest of us, real, with a date, a guru or doctor who was also a deity, a true one, not some mythological figure. Christianity thus became an emotive metaphysical novel about love, in which the deity and humanity loved one another passionately; and the kernel of the plot was a celestial being's deliberate sacrifice in order to redeem all those who believed in him (later on, the claim became that he would redeem the whole of humanity). This being was ceaselessly to grow in stature. Jesus ended up being just as much a god as God himself, without actually being that God in person. Between 150 and 250, a 'numerical' label was provided for the 'Trinity', the One God in three divine persons, where Christ found his place.

In another stroke of genius, Jesus of Nazareth preached, not observance of the Sabbath and the other commandments of their Law, but an internal ethic, a morality for the way one thought (a man was already committing adultery in his heart when he secretly coveted his neighbour's wife). An ethic such as this could suit everyone. In contrast to the caste spirit of the priests and scribes, which was anchored in observance of the Jewish Law, this was a morality that sprang from humble folk.

And it has the air of a morality for the whole of humanity. But that was not Jesus' intention, for he was preaching solely to his own people. To us, his lofty language seems universalist because it claimed higher ground than Jewish legalism.[2] However, when Jesus spoke in a less elevated mode, he reverted to being the Jewish prophet that he was. 'I am not

sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . It is not meet to take the children's [the Children of Israel] bread and to cast it to dogs',[3] that is to say 'to pagans'.

However, after his death it was his more elevated, popular and new message, that relayed by the synoptic Gospels, that his disciples were to preach to their Jewish compatriots. This was a message which, by raising the temperature of the soul, could render the existence of even humble folk rich and precious.[4] These preachers were filled with the passion of their Lord and of a message that they vaguely felt they had had a hand in creating. Some were content to possess the true faith and to share it with a small group of the faithful, while others, more ambitious, wished to 'sell' it more widely. It was tempting to spread far and wide the news of the God who had inherited from Israel the privilege of being the only true one and whose teaching, although intended only for the circumcised, was sufficiently spiritual to be accepted by all men.

If pagans, attracted by this superior religion, asked for baptism, should they be turned away? St Peter was the first to succumb to the temptation: he baptized the Centurion Cornelius, an uncircumcised man. This constituted a snag for his principles; but when pious zeal is ambitious and impulsive, it is not always scrupulous. It may also be condescending: the God of the Christian Jews, who was better than all other gods, was offered to a pagan as a lesson[5] and out of charity.[6]

Should proselytism be considered a natural inclination and an anthropological universal? No, it is always a matter of temperament and the circumstances. In each disciple's soul there raged an unconscious battle between ambition, laziness and devotion to the Law of his people; and sometimes one of those elements won out, sometimes another. For, behind a man's consciousness and elevated reasons, impulses are at work.

Not everyone favours proselytism. Among pagans, some convinced believers, philosophers and priests of foreign gods never aspired to establish a monopoly for their wares and

were content to wait quietly for clients to come to them. It is equally common not to wish to sell anything and to consider the doctrine to which one holds the key to be a privilege reserved for the elite. With a few exceptions, philosophers were likely to be born only in the social class of the literate 'notables'. In some cases, certain individuals feel they are worth more if they belong to the small elite of sages and cannot be said to be 'fools' or 'mediocre' (*phauloi* was the word used by Greek thinkers). Others, in contrast, whose origins are modest or who belong to an organized and authoritarian Church, only sense that satisfaction if they have convinced or forced someone else, for his own good, to think as they do, so that they find a mirror image of themselves at every turn.

Universalism was not introduced into Christianity by an intrusion of Reason or Spirituality. It reflected a shift on the part of ambitious, non-elitist temperaments, an inclination which, de facto, then became customary. The case of St Paul is different: a self-proclaimed apostle, despite his never having heard or known Jesus, this agitator dared to set up the bypassing of Judaism as a *de jure* doctrine.[7] But Paul was only one missionary among plenty of others who made converts in Eastern provinces where he never set foot.

Peter's baptism of Cornelius had scandalized many, but some disciples made an unexpected discovery: namely, that this fortunate little slip in Christian doctrine opened up access to an immense potential 'market' in the pagan empire, even as their own compatriots were massacring them or ejecting them from the Jewish community.[8] Jesus himself had announced that there should be as many guests as possible at the future Celestial Banquet.[9] Some disciples interpreted this as an invitation to escape from the isolation in which Judaism had been trapped amid the other nations. Their proselytizing, instead of being directed solely towards Israel, as Jesus had ordered, was instead turned towards the immense pagan 'market' of the (other) 'nations' and gained them access to Churches that were organized, disciplined and

hierarchized. What, thanks to these, found a material form was not a pure ideal, but a concrete project with its own self-interested motives and its own set-up; it was a project as sublime as could be wished, but precise and narrow in its 'discourse'.

In the space of three decades, the admission of non-Jews into Christianized Judaism led to a split between ethnic sects of circumcised Judaeo-Christians and the new religion that reached out to all and sundry. Platonic metaphysics and certain pagan superstitions (ex-votos, prayers for rain, etc.) or new ones (involving relics) contributed to the formation of Christian doctrine and pious practices. Origins are seldom beautiful; realities and truths develop through epigenesis; they are not pre-formed in any seed. To speak of the Christian *roots* of Europe is not just mistaken, but simply nonsense: in history, nothing is pre-formed. At the very most, Europe possesses a Christian *patrimony*; it lives in an old house whose walls are hung with old religious paintings.

So let us speak no more of roots but, rather, of a patrimony. The present-day West possesses a vast and precious architectural, artistic, literary, musical and even phraseological patrimony that is largely Christian, but there is no longer anything Christian about its morality and values. If it ever did have any Christian roots, they were severed long ago. What about asceticism? That no longer finds any place in our minds. The love of one's neighbour? The Christian slaves of the past were in duty bound to love their master and obey him, and a Christian master loved his slaves. That was as far as it went. In 1870, still, modernity was alien and contrary to Catholicism. Nowadays, the minority of believers share the same practical morality as the unbelieving majority (not all Christian families have six children). Sometimes present-day values (sexual freedom, equality between the sexes) are alien to Christianity; sometimes they have been imposed upon it by the law (freedom of conscience) and Christianity has adapted to them (secularity, democratization); and sometimes it has adopted modern values (reductions in social

inequalities). Ever since the 1891 encyclical on the conditions of the working class, Christianity has acquired modern roots. And the 2,000-year-old history of dogmas, piety and interpretations of the Holy Books show that Christianity, as it has developed (through epigenesis), has never ceased to construct itself and adapt.

6

Notwithstanding Heidegger, Man is an Intelligent Animal

My head is spinning. Let us pause for a moment. Where have we got to? Have we, beneath our feet, something solid on which to rely? When climbing in the mountains, one is happy to feel one's crampons biting into the ice on slopes covered in shifting snow. And yes, a Montaigne or a Hume has a cold solidity beneath his feet (but you can chuck out the vacillations of young Veyne and his Greeks believing in their myths):[1] metaphysics is inaccessible to human intelligence and general ideas are false because they are hollow; on the other hand, we can accede to an empirical knowledge of things that are singular. For all that our eyes perceive or ever will perceive are singularities that are partially repeatable: hence, among other things, the exact sciences, but also the practices and knowledge about our daily life and our understanding of one another. We have thus learnt that the sun rises every day. Foucault and Hume faced the same struggle . . .[2]

As Jean-Marie Schaeffer has explained to us, knowledge is an interaction between two spatio-temporal realities, an individual and his environment. It is an empirical process, not a heavenly mirror. Things in themselves, detached from our 'discourses', which cut them up and model them to suit their image, would only ever be accessible to a superhuman

intelligence. To echo Alexandre Koyré, a man is capable of conceiving of the idea of truth but probably incapable of reaching the Truth itself.

Man is not the shepherd of Being of whom Heidegger speaks; humanity is one species of animal among many others. Here is what Nietzsche had to say:

> Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of the universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing [. . .] There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which would lead it beyond human life.[3]

Sceptics have always believed that animals possess souls, and Foucault would tell me of the intelligence of the cat that would visit, each in turn, every apartment at 285 rue de Vaugirard: 'He understands everything!' Humanity, having ceased to be at the centre of the world with Copernicus, and then, with Darwin,[4] having become a living species, with Nietzsche loses any kind of meta-empirical vocation or justification. Nietzsche's philosophical novel, telling of humanity's education, cannot hope to reach any conclusion (but, never fear, that will not stop it forging on; the human mind is never annihilated and, besides, human history does not depend on the history of philosophy).

In a letter to me, Jean-Marie Schaeffer remarked that nothing is further from Foucault's attitude than 'the messianic pathos of Heidegger' and the latter's belief in 'the fated historicity' of mankind and *Dasein*. I speak of historicity because, if I have reached a little understanding of this difficult and obscure (the two are not the same) thinker, Heidegger, just as much as Foucault, was imbued with a sense of becoming and of discontinuities, or at least he was after his famous 'turn' in thinking. His admirers indulgently concede that his language is sometimes mystical. Dominique

Janicaud adds that his historicity leads to the attitude of a prophet[5] and a lonely wait, amid an elite, for the 'god who will come'.[6]

Oh well! Having slipped into my bullet-proof vest, I venture to suggest that Heidegger, that original thinker, set out to restore to an age that had forgotten all about transcendence an equivalent of what used to be called Spirituality which was refined enough to be acceptable. He sets before a sceptical age the idea of a Truth that unveils itself without any need for human ratiocination. To accede to it, no dialectic is required; one reaches it by 'making a leap'.[7] In an age of unbelievers, he restores an Absolute that is neither metaphysical 'Being' nor the God of religions. This is an Absolute 'that reveals itself only by hiding', that re-veils itself as soon as it is unveiled and is sufficiently present-yet-absent to remain credible. In an age in which history and truth stand in opposition, he proposes an Absolute whose sudden and unexplained appearances introduce a new age yet are 'historical' in their discontinuity.

Heideggerism constitutes a vast historical landscape illuminated by flashes of lightning that are so many 'events', *Ereignisse*.[8] History means a reign with a single origin but that starts off in many different ways.[9] With each of these flashes of lightning which, however, are not visible to the naked eye, a new age makes its presence felt to us, each with its particular communities, works, cultures (ours is technological) and religious beliefs. Dispersed and divergent though they are, these events all have a common origin and that origin is an Absolute that imposes upon us, not truth, strictly speaking, but its unchallengeable Presence, if – that is – we are able to open up to it instead of engaging in scientific ratiocination on the details. Heidegger tried to escape from a Platonic One and to clear for history the huge place that it needs, but to do so without sinking into relativism: for all those invisible lightning flashes of truth have the same origin. But is that enough in order to escape from relativism? Is this a stroke of philosophical genius or simply a verbal solution? We shall be returning to this question.

According to Heidegger, humanity's fundamental mistake, all too often, is to forget that Presence amid inauthentic distractions of the kind that Pascal describes. Heideggerian man is above all a being with an inner life: cast into this world, he knows care, he is destined to die and he is either authentic or not authentic; but he has no body, knows nothing of desire, need, work or political deliberation. Such a man, or at least his *Dasein*, boils down to whatever it is, in man, that can become a kind of *homo religiosus* or can fail to do so. Let me dare to name it: *Dasein* is a soul. This soul will be authentic so long as it does not forget its mutual and immediate relationship with Being; it will be inauthentic if it forgets that relationship and dissipates itself amid the day-to-day multiplicity of things that characterizes a scientific approach. This high-flying gnosis is a theology without God,[10] a negative theology of the coincidence of opposites and the bottomless Abyss that it is impossible to seize upon but is present in its *Ereignisse*, which constitute so many theophanies.

Man is not one living species among many others. What singles him out is the fact that the Truth can come to be in him, whereas it never can in other animals. This Truth does not consist in the fact that two plus two makes four, or any of the other little truths that our minds seize upon: it is not within man, rather he is within it. It happens to him, discloses itself to him, or at least it does provided he renounces any claim to objectivity. Only this setting out (through which the very fact that he is, himself, from birth set out in the Truth is revealed to him) makes a man worthy of that name,[11] a man who knows that Being and man belong to each other (*Zu-einander-gehören*). Such Truth consists in knowing that one is within the Truth. This implies no judgement; on the contrary, our countless judgements can only be true or false thanks to man's original opening up to the truth.[12] This cannot be demonstrated logically or factually, Heidegger tells us: it is a purely philosophical Truth; it comes about through an *act*, that of setting oneself out into it.[13]

Heidegger is not one of those thinkers for whom the horizon of what is visible is the limit of what can permissibly be spoken of. His was one of those souls that have a sense of something elevated, oceanic, endlessly blue, beyond that which is verifiable. That presentiment explains how it is that some of Heidegger's partisans are so fervent, or indeed aggressive. Many people, maybe most, have to some degree that presentiment of a blue sky beyond the sky that we see. No one is obliged to believe them, but it would be ridiculous to condemn them (rather, they are to be envied for that gift). But with dechristianization, they no longer know how to feed their desire for that blue sky. Were they to be tempted to offer it a diet of Heideggerism, they should know that the price to be paid would be high: they would have to resign themselves to a kind of fatalism; they would no longer be able to distinguish the true from the false in existing things (or even appreciate good painting), and they would have to believe in Being and Events in an act of the kind of faith that is required more usually by religions than by philosophies.

For the intellect plays no part in the relationship between *Dasein* and Being. Emmanuel Faye informs me that Heidegger never refers to any intellectual intuition but does, on more than one occasion, speak of 'our belief'. And if one does not believe, one is inauthentic. But what reasons would we have for believing this sublime metaphysical story? None; as will be remembered, a leap of faith is required. And once Heidegger affirms the reign of the Absolute and the Origin that first conceals itself, then reveals itself, all the rest, to wit our thick coating of human reality, does not seem to exist in his eyes. His doctrine thus implies a simplified, amputated humanity that is alien to reality.

That certainly seems to be the case of his famous theory of a truth that reveals itself. To be sure, he is partially right: phenomenologically speaking, one 'sees' things instantaneously and 'believes in them' immediately, without needing to judge them to be true, without needing to pass judgement on the finer details of the sensation (as Merleau-Ponty would say). And what we 'see' revealing themselves to us are actual

things: we do not consult a photograph that represents them – a fact that allows Heidegger to speak of presence rather than of what is self-evident. However, presence is not all that is involved; for it is no more than the condition for the possibility of the truth, its origin; if we 'saw' nothing, no truth would be possible. But does that mean that all that we 'see' is true? It is not enough to have placed one's faith in the origin since, to cite Koyré,[14] the origin of truth and the essence of truth are not the same thing. If I have understood this correctly, by looking no further than the origin, Heidegger has denied himself the possibility of distinguishing truth from error. Is what I am seeing at this moment a perception or a hallucination? Presence or no presence, all reality in this world of ours can be subjected to a critical examination, for truth possesses an essence, which is that it corresponds to its object. Maybe 'the simplicity of a look and acceptance' is enough to render vain all the ideologies of the twentieth century, as Heidegger had the effrontery to claim,[15] but over and above that fine simplicity, a little critical activity would have been useful to him as he faced the Nazi ideology.

The same telescoping of origin and essence occurs in the domain of art. Yes, to be sure, Cézanne's paintings of Sainte-Victoire are icons of the goddess that the painter of Aix worshipped in his heart, but without that pictorial quality that is the essence of painting, they would not be icons, but simply ordinary daubs. And that telescoping also occurs in the domain of politics, leading to a kind of fatalism: a fated origin (the historico-world mission of Germany, in other words *Gestell*) suffices to dictate to what politics one should rally, without even taking into consideration its specific essence. But what if, for example, that essence was to make human beings live together in peace? I am not saying that is the only possible riposte, but one has to make some reply rather than content oneself with a presumed predestined origin. If *Gestell*, technology, is our destiny today, thanks to the opening up of an *Ereignis*, must we resign ourselves and wait fatalistically for that to come to an end, when there will

be a subsequent Sending? Surely not, for, as has been pointed out by Dominique Janicaud (who, at a stroke, thereupon ceased to believe in the Heideggerian gnosis of his youth),[16] the package does not arrive all at once, but in stages, over a period of time, which leaves human beings with the possibility of reacting politically. The point, precisely, is that human beings do possess a critical intelligence and reason – or at least understanding – and, if they deem it right to do so, they can try to stave off disaster.[17]

Unlike Heidegger, a few of whose works he had read[18] (as we shall soon see), Foucault was not inclined to mysticism; nor did he like to generalize about humanity. However, on one occasion he did so, writing as follows: 'With humanity, life has ended up with a living creature that never quite finds itself in the right place, a living creature destined to *wander* and endlessly *make mistakes*'[19] (Foucault's italics): *make mistakes* in that, although 'discourse' enables one to know that which is empirical or phenomenal, yet human beings do believe in general or meta-empirical ideas; *wander* because all that human beings think and do in their societies and cultures is arbitrary and changes from one period to another, for nothing transcendent or even transcendental guides the unpredictable becoming of humanity.

The comment of Foucault's that I have just cited is an almost word-for-word transfer from Heidegger, but its meaning has been totally changed. In a famous work, *The Essence of Truth*, the German thinker evokes human wandering (*Irre*) to convey the idea that man (I am oversimplifying) nearly always passes by the Absolute without noticing it and proceeds along the banal path of humdrum or scientific truths.[20] 'Every period of universal history is an age of wandering',[21] because it forgets that the authentic essence of man (the famous *Dasein*) ought to open itself up to the Mystery of Everything. However, instead of living constantly dispersed amid our knowledge of things, it does sometimes happen that we reflect *on the very fact* of our knowledge, which is a unique privilege that neither plants nor animals possess. This makes human beings living crea-

tures unlike all others. If a human being thinks about this and listens to the *Dasein* within him, he will discover that any transaction with things – ideas, perceptions – is only possible for a being such as himself, who transcends nature and comes into direct contact with Being, the Absolute. This, according to Heidegger, should be the basis of all philosophy.

For an empiricist such as Foucault, that Being is a verbal phantom provoked, I imagine, by what is claimed to be an intellectual intuition, a phantom that can be made to say whatever one wants. The fact that we know things is but one reality in the world in which we live and every truth can be submitted to a critique. If human beings constantly make mistakes, that is because they never accede to the truth itself but can only reach it through the 'discourses' in which it is buried, 'discourses' that are never the same from one period to another.

So let us now return to Foucault, our hero, and to his concept of humanity. But whatever was he saying when speaking of our perpetual wanderings and our mistakes? Surely that was a generalization, even a proposition of philosophical anthropology! So what happened to his scepticism? It is true that, at that point, his scepticism had just reached its limit. Foucault's declaration that is cited above states a truth that is the last word on the human condition: there is an ultimate truth and that, disappointing as it is, is it. As we have noted above, a disastrous balance-sheet does not bring ruination upon itself; nor does doubt arise on its own; arguably, everything is relative, but the assertion that everything is relative is not relative.

Underlying the above declaration and surrounding it, we can imagine on all sides – before us, far away from us, and after us in the future – a thousand possible human variations, a thousand past, future or exotic truths that belong to a limited period of time and a particular place. None of those truths will be any truer than our own truths, but what I have just written here *is* true. We may know nothing of those human beings of the past, elsewhere or in the future, but at least we know that they are human beings like ourselves,

trapped in a particular 'discourse' and a particular set-up, and only half-free: they are our brothers. 'But', you may say, 'being curious about others and not judging them, is that not humanism?' Well, would you prefer a more edifying dogmatism?

So Foucault has written an anthropological generalization. But that anthropology is empirical, since it did not stem from reflection upon any transcendental subject that holds the key to the world; and Foucault wrote it after meditating on historical facts. But it is at the same time a philosophical anthropology since the statement raises us above ourselves, lifting us out of our time, our place, all our little truths, and in a word, out of our fishbowl. Beneath us we can see the creatures swimming round and round in their bowl, as if they are no longer ourselves.

The conclusion must be that man is not a fallen angel recalling the heavens; nor is he the Shepherd of Being, as Heidegger claims. Rather, he is an erratic animal about which all that can be known is his history, which is perpetually positive, lacking the external resource of a negativity that, little by little, would lead to totality.

Consequently, if, for us humans, there are no true truths other than those that are empirical and singular, that is because a physical or mental event is the product of conjunctions of a variety of causal series, conjunctions that are just another word for chance, as we all know. So it is that coming to be happens, does not repeat itself and ceaselessly switches direction in a most unexpected fashion.

Apart from the mistakes that it may happen to make, humanity believes in general ideas that win obedience (what we take to be the truth affects our behaviour), general ideas that, in each era, are socially acceptable as true. More often than not, when we speak of the truth, those are the truths to which we refer. 'By truth,' writes Foucault, 'I do not mean the whole collection of true things that are there to be discovered or to win acceptance, but the whole collection of rules according to which we disentangle what is true from what is false and attach to what is true the specific effects of

power.'[22] And Wittgenstein would have approved of his following remark in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 'discourses', rules and norms 'operate according to a sort of uniform anonymity, on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field'.[23]

We are surrounded, pressured and ringed by truths. One may hear protests such as 'Well, after all the truth does exist', yet more often than not the truth in question is no such thing. Yes, yes, I know: a society cannot keep going without conventions and prejudices. But is this the point at which to say so? Edifying rhetoric and philosophy are two different things, and philosophy does not like to be hurried. It likes to ascertain what the current position is and then take its time in identifying where prejudice is at work.

On the one hand, then, there are singularities that I have boldly compared to Spinozist modes; on the other hand, the concepts and 'discourses' that are too general and misleading in which we clothe those singularities: e.g., 'Religion', 'Democracy'. We may sum up Foucault's thinking by setting in opposition the modes of Spinoza[24] and the monads of Leibnitz.[25] The monads are not singularities; each one is an imperfect and partial expression of true reality. If we consider objective minds as monads, we can argue that the various religions, the diverse forms of democracy and the moralities of different peoples are so many monads, so many imperfect and partial expressions of 'true' democracy, or 'true' religion, and that they must be explained on the basis of those monads.

In fact, ever since Plato, this has been the customary way in which we think. The multiple is an imperfect expression of the One. There is always a margin of difference, it is claimed, between a form, an essence (democracy, for example) and the corresponding reality. In the world in which we live, nothing is perfect: let us resort to the word 'incarnation' or, as the Greeks did, attribute to matter this gap between the form and the reality; and then let us close our eyes to the problem. But the very spirit of Foucauldism lies in our not closing our eyes and in allowing essences to

fade away so that we can perceive, in their place, little 'discursive' realities.

Shall we accept the gap between the ideal and the real or shall we draw political conclusions from it? This is a matter that concerns each one of us. On the one hand, on the right, we may say that, given that everything is an imperfect reflection of its Idea or Form, we may as well let things be. However, for Foucault, nothing is a reflection of an ideal; each policy is simply the product of a concatenation of causes; there is no external totality available; it expresses nothing more elevated than itself, even if we do drown its singularity in noble generalizations. But, in so doing, Foucault renders impossible the old leftist thinking, which aspires to true democracy, the goal/end of history. He rules out intellectual generalists such as Sartre or Bourdieu, who take up their position by virtue of an ideal of society or a sense of history. Foucault wishes to be a specialized intellectual who takes exception to certain singularities that he has encountered by chance, in his existence or in the exercise of his profession.[26] This is an intellectual of a new variety, the specific intellectual much discussed around 1980.

We must not panic at the idea of not being able to cling on to the skirts of fully satisfactory truths. Our faculty of knowledge is more than equal to that possessed by animals which, like ourselves, may make mistakes but nevertheless by and large manage to cope with the details of their existence. We do not live in the world of the gnostics of politics, a hallucinatory world manipulated by ideologies; rather, we know many little truths and empirical singularities, we act upon whole series of phenomena, which we are able to study and manipulate. We can achieve practical or even scientific results in both the exact and the human sciences. We can recognize our mistakes and our wanderings. Not that this will stop that wandering, but even this does not stop us from living, for we live in actuality.

7

The Physical and Human Sciences: Foucault's Programme

A number of serious problems remain. If everything or almost everything is doubtful, except for day-to-day reality (as the Greek Sceptics would have said),[1] how is it that the exact sciences manage to produce indubitable results? And how valuable are the sciences of human singularities, for their part: history, sociology, economics? Are they even possible?[2] And, as for the great sceptic, Foucault himself, did he doubt the veracity and the future of his own undertaking? I certainly do not think so, but let us first address the human sciences.

The conflict, sometimes flagrant, sometimes masked, between the human and the exact sciences has been going on for a hundred years: in comparison to the 'hard' sciences, what is the epistemological status and the degree of rigour of the human sciences? Some of those in the 'hard' camp claim that the answer is 'very low'; and some of those at the receiving end of their criticisms retort, 'But we too will discover the laws of history and society, or we shall at least construct "models".' 'You had certainly better find some, like the economists,' warned Gilles-Gaston Granger, 'or else you are lost.'

At this point, in 1991, the sociologist and philosopher Jean-Claude Passeron made a contribution to the debate, one

that the humble historian that I am believes to have been decisive for the epistemology of sociological as well as historical knowledge. Even better than Max Weber, with his ideal types, Passeron, rejecting the overly scientific position of the problem, indicated where to find a scientificity for the human sciences: not in an imitation of the exact sciences, in the establishment of laws and models – let alone hypothetico-deductive systems – but in the elaboration of what could be called semi-proper nouns.

This epistemological and methodological theory of semi-proper nouns accords with what I take to be the ontological principle of Foucauldism, namely, the principle of singularity. This tacitly assumes that, in every period, the historical universe has always been a chaos of singularities that stem from the previous period of chaos. I am somewhat out of my depth with these lofty thoughts, so, for want of anything better, I shall set them out in down-to-earth language and then attempt to do better in a discreet note.[3]

Consider a singular person, the current president of the French Republic, for instance, or your own sister. That person is singular, so he or she is designated by a proper noun. The meaning of this proper noun can only be understood if I know this person, if I have read or heard about him or her, or if I have seen him or her. If not, the person will be unknown to me, I shall not know who I am being told about and his or her name 'will say nothing to me'. Blonde, medium-sized nose, medium-sized forehead, high cheekbones . . . Is a longer description needed? There would be no end to it (as any modern logician will tell you): a passport photograph would be more helpful.

The same applies to some of the common nouns that history books are crammed with and that designate events or processes: caesaro-papism, feudalism, religion, the formation of national unity. These are really proper nouns of a kind, for even the longest paraphrase would fail to convey exactly what a religion is to a being who had never encountered one; for him to understand, you would have to 'show' him one. Proper names are 'indefinite descriptions': however

much you list the characteristics of their referent, the description will never be finished, never be complete. Similarly, in the social sciences, concepts that refuse to refer to individual or collective singularities 'cannot be contained in a definitive description nor can they flourish in the universality of laws'.[4] So, when you want to introduce feudalism or caesaro-papism into the book you are writing, you leave it a bit of its historical soil, as you would leave a little earth on the roots of a plant that you wish to pot.

Events, like individuals, are things 'that you never see twice', as the poet Alfred de Vigny pointed out in *La maison du berger*. Like traffic accidents, they are always due to the coincidence of a number of causal series. Unlike plants or animals, they cannot be positioned in a typology or a classification of *genera* or species; nor are they identifiable unambiguously thanks to a limited number of marks of identification, whereas chemical bodies such as lead, uranium 235 or sodium chloride are all identifiable through their chemical formulae or their atomic weight in the periodic classification of elements.

Historians write history using other means. The semi-proper nouns that they use can likewise possess a scientific rigour, a rigour peculiar to the human domain. They attain that identificatory rigour by 'densifying' the description of the semi-proper noun in the same way as a realist novelist or a reporter, multiplying cogent details and relevant features that lend precision to the portrait of the referent and make it possible to distinguish it from events that present a misleading resemblance to it.[5] Thanks to that densification, that intermeshing of tiny true facts, one avoids drowning in summary essentialist artefacts such as race, national genius, and so on.

As for the so-called exact sciences, they are born of a lucky, rather than god-sent, discovery of the right key to open up physical phenomena,[6] and these, unlike human becoming, present repetitive regularities. This makes it possible to arrive at technical applications, predictions that turn out to be exact and experimental verifications: there are so

many things in nature that can be enumerated and calculated! However, we should not conclude from those spectacular successes and truths, experimentally demonstrable and empirically applicable, that a pre-established harmony exists between our minds and nature: physicists construct models that make it possible to predict and manipulate reality, but we have no way of knowing whether their representation really corresponds to it. I know how to drive a car successfully by correctly following the instructions, but I confess that I know nothing about what happens under the car's closed bonnet.

The physical sciences do come up against the finitude of our faculty of understanding[7] and our inability to reach Being without making presuppositions. They too rest upon theoretical presuppositions and 'paradigms' (which, in any case, may well need revision or rethinking from scratch). Using the term 'discourse', Foucault detected in human thought and action that which, for their part, present-day historians and theorists of science detect in the evolution of the physical sciences, using the expressions 'paradigms' (Thomas S. Kuhn), 'research programmes' (Imre Lakatos[8]) or 'styles of scientific thought (or reasoning)' (Alastair C. Crombie and Ian Hacking). What Hacking writes about 'styles of reasoning' could equally be said of Foucault's 'discourses': each of both the former and the latter

> introduces a new kind of object: the criteria of existence of objects of the new type are provided by the style of reasoning itself. A style of reasoning is not answerable to any other jurisdiction. The style of reasoning itself defines the criteria of truth in its own domain.[9]

What has ensured the many successes of these sciences – successes that have made an uninterrupted continuation of their projects necessary – has been and still is a Foucauldian 'set-up'. Take physics, for example. This science exemplifies the continuity of an undertaking which, over time and thanks to constant correction, has obtained results that are provi-

sional but nevertheless indubitable. It is like a commercial company that remains faithful to tried and tested methods that ensure its lasting success. This is founded not upon a heaven-sent calling, but upon a tested tradition. All the same, we should not conclude that there exists some harmony between our minds and nature: physicists construct coherent models that are not claimed to correspond exactly to reality, but that do make it possible to predict and manipulate effects.

Husserl wanted to resolve this mystery by rooting science in a transcendental Self,[10] with a vocation for the truth that was the condition that made such a stubborn enterprise possible. If, on the contrary, we reason as Foucault would, we will retort that that Self is simply one of those 'empirico-transcendental doublets' that *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) challenges. By giving a metaphysical origin to an institutional university tradition that is completely empirical – in a word, a 'set-up' – Husserl sanctifies it. Physics was founded not as a project sent down by some transcendental Self, as humanity's vocation, but rather as something sociological: the establishment of an institutional tradition, founded upon success, that might have been interrupted but was not.

It should be added that the truths of physical science are perpetually provisional: Newton is succeeded by Einstein. In physical science one cannot do without some relation to the truth or without distinguishing between what is true and what is false; but, equally, one cannot take those truths to be definitive.[11] Error is not radically different from truth; it is just a hypothesis refuted by experimentation; there is no such thing as rational self-evidence.

The fact remains that, even if Newton did not perceive the whole truth, he nevertheless was 'into the truth'. And this provisional state of the truth, along with the perpetuation of physics as a well-founded discipline, will enable us to respond to another question raised above: how was it that Foucault believed – for he certainly did – in the truth and durability of his own doctrine, all the merit of which he attributed to

Nietzsche (or to certain selected aspects of Nietzsche, whose work he had read at the rue d'Ulm [the École normale supérieure] in 1952–3, and also to Heidegger[12])? His entire *oeuvre* presupposes human finitude in time, and the relation between man and time seems insurmountable. Human beings are both the objects of knowledge and subjects that know; and historical knowledge is trapped by its own history, which is mainly one of variations and wanderings. How can a historian ever believe that he has established himself upon a rock that time is not about to sweep away?[13]

It is true that Foucault does not seem to be sure of himself. 'I know perfectly well that I am inserted into a context,' he writes.[14] I nevertheless think that it is impossible to doubt the great, silent hope that sometimes buoyed him up. The Nietzsche that he had chosen was, whatever Heidegger had claimed, the instigator of the great break with metaphysics and Platonism. And, around 1960, it may have seemed that the postmodern world, for its part, would free itself from the illusion of some transcendent basis and a superhuman enlightenment that suggested it could perceive a truth that corresponded to all things and could also make out its true way forward. The 'death of God', in the sense of the end of the age of all transcendences, would make it possible for humanity to sober up, shed its illusions and see itself as it is, in all its nakedness and solitude. Modesty and prudence stop a thinker from broadcasting his hopes; nevertheless, Foucault did one day imprudently suggest that in our own period humanity was beginning to learn that it could live without myths, without religion and without philosophy[15] or generalizations about itself. That was what the Nietzschean revolution meant and he reckoned that he was carrying it forward.

As he saw it, a genealogical critique, as practised by him, possessed – as did Galilean physics – all the scientificity of a well-founded empirical project.[16] It sometimes happened that he made mistakes and he acknowledged the theoretical errors he had committed in *The History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic*; but his undertaking was, nevertheless, 'into the truth'.[17] The resolute tone of voice, that of a declaration of

faith, in which he one day told me that Nietzschean hermeneutics had engineered a decisive break in the history of knowledge, showed clearly that he believed this and was hopeful.

He had not forgotten that no man can pre-judge his eventual posthumous destiny; but he envisaged a more empirical possibility. When he said, as he repeatedly did, that his books were mere 'tool-boxes', it did not mean that he modestly agreed that they contained no treasures. What he meant by those words was that he hoped he would have students (using that university term) and he invited readers of goodwill to make use of his methods and continue his work, just as a physicist has students who will continue his research.

Relativism, historicism, Spenglerism? No!

But the question of time and truth still remains to be resolved. For Foucault, the answer seems to have lain in two convictions: genealogical history is not a philosophy; it studies empirical phenomena[18] and makes no claim to discover the whole truth. Furthermore, it 'is related to the sciences and to analyses of a scientific type or to theories subject to rigorous criteria'.[19] It can lead to detailed conclusions on ancient love, madness and prisons that are both scientifically established and perpetually provisional and revisable, just as are discoveries made by other sciences. Sooner or later, someone will do better than Foucault and people will be amazed at his short-sightedness. But, for him, it was enough to dispel the four illusions that, as he saw it, were correspondence, the universal, the rational and the transcendental.

Foucauldism is not perched high on the top of a cliff, it does not overlook the totality of all things since it does not a priori constitute its object and since, for whoever is not a god, to constitute it oneself would be the only way to look down on to it. He does not know where his own place on a map of totality might be; nor what might lie beyond its limits.[20] But is it really so necessary to philosophize? 'A

scientific activity can perfectly well leave that problem aside, beyond the limits within which it operates.'[21]

You may object 'that it is inevitable that one should be a philosopher, in the sense that it is inevitable to think about totality'.[22] But is it inevitable? Thinking about totality is but one of the forms taken by what is known as philosophy and it is, above all, the form that it takes for Hegel.[23] Husserl was probably the last of the totalizers.[24] It is even possible to envisage that a philosophy might retrench 'by becoming relativist'.[25] At this point I wonder what that philosophy, at once relative and rigorous, might be if not a perpetually provisional science in progress, or at least the programme adopted by that science. (Had *The Archaeology of Knowledge* not been written too early and too hastily, I imagine it would have provided that programme.)

A historian who is a genealogist cannot avoid the realization that his analysis of the 'discourse' on love in the ancient world will one day be superseded by a better one. However, he is not paralysed by that realization (and that is a revealing side to the psychology of a scholar: a physicist who has just discovered a law does not flatter himself that his discovery is definitive, but he hardly thinks about that and it does not bother him). If genealogical archaeology is a science, a successful enterprise, each of its conclusions, taken one by one, possesses a truth that is not relative, but is provisional. Archaeology is aware that all the thinking that it does 'will be done again by thought that has not yet seen the light of day'.[26] No more can a physicist anticipate what his science will ultimately lead to. Scientists are not concerned to reconcile finitude with infinity but, like everyone else, they live in the here and now without thinking too much about it, and the rest of humanity does likewise.

Unfortunately (and Foucault is almost obsessively aware of this), the impossibility of rising above and looking down on thought means that even the most revolutionary of thinkers can never escape from our little world of 'discourse'. The truths of genealogy and archaeology are seen in the 'perspective'[27] of the moment. 'So how is it that you claim to speak

and describe the "discourse" of others, from so far above and so far away?' a genealogist may be asked.[28] Humbly, he replies that he starts out from his own 'discourse'. He analyses the 'discourses' of the past on the basis of the 'discourse' that is his own[29] and that limits him. When he tries to shed light on this 'thought that precedes free thought', in other words a 'discourse', he thinks of himself starting from 'a thought before thought, thought that is anonymous and constraining'. Stepping back from the space from which he was speaking, he positions himself, *ipso facto*, within another 'discourse' with which he is not familiar[30] 'and which will recede as fast as he discovers it'.[31]

The unease that those quotations reflect is characteristic of modern thought over the past two centuries. Is it any safer to believe in human rights than it was to believe in the god Jupiter? Here, again, our attitude is twofold, as it was when faced with Daphne's bay tree. We are sure that our convictions are true and would be indignant if the existence of that truth was brought into question. Meanwhile, though, it is with a certain unease that we wonder what future men will think of our thoughts. (Similarly, in the heyday of the Europe of nation-states, a reflective patriot felt uneasy when he wondered what positions he would have adopted had he been born on the other side of the Pyrenees or the Rhine. But that kind of unease tends to be buried deep in silence.)

As we have known for twenty-five centuries, mores and beliefs vary according to their time and place, but – Foucault tells us[32] – so long as God was alive, that was not particularly alarming: there might be truth on one side of the Pyrenees and error on the other side but, for Pascal, truth nevertheless existed, for it was taught and guaranteed by God. Human variations were so many errors that were due to human weakness, but in the face of them God set up the truth. The tragic turning point came in the nineteenth century with the discovery of exotic cultures and religions and the blotting out of that infinite God. Human finitude lost its guarantor of the truth and remained alone, faced with all its errors and wanderings. Truth and time became enemies. Hence Spengler and hence

the relativism according to which each epoch has its own truth; hence too Heidegger's sublime or verbal attempt to rediscover the absolute, notwithstanding time.

At least, unlike Spengler, Foucault could not be and never was a relativist, since, in default of totality and truth that corresponds to reality, and without things in themselves, he did, after all, lay claim to scientificity and empirical truths that were provisional in perpetuity. Relativism – if it ever existed except as a breastplate to cleave in twain – was, despite its name, a doctrine that aspired naively to total truth. This distinguished it from historicism,[33] for which the truth mattered less than the richness and diversity of Life and the 'solemnity of becoming' of which Simmel writes: for this suggestive and sympathetic thinker, there was a psychological a priori, just as there was a historical a priori for Foucault – each type of mind engendered a particular vision of the world.

As for relativism, that was quite different. It only went to extremes when it thought it would rediscover the Rock of Truth: 'since historical time in passing ruins all truth, let us recognize that very frailty as our basis and accept the following tragic contradiction: Truth is both one and many, each epoch has its truth'. We may well wonder whether that assertion makes any sense: it engenders paradoxes comparable to those of a time-travel machine. Relativism presumes the truth to be true, since it asserts that, in possessing its own truth, each epoch possessed not just beliefs, but the truth (which, however, was only true for that particular epoch). Its aspiration to total truth despite time is such that it is ready to do anything, even to the point of chopping it into pieces, each for a different epoch, in order to preserve it, albeit in pieces, since each of those shards of the truth are said to form a partial totality, if I dare risk that oxymoron.

If there is any relativism worthy of the name, it is that of Heidegger. According to him, the 'epochal' truths that the Origin successively sends us are all equally true, although not reconcilable: Heidegger accepts the arbitrary nature of the Origin, which therefore remains as elusive to us as its

decrees are incomprehensible. Likewise, for Descartes, 'mathematical truths, which you call eternal, were established by God and are entirely dependent on him'.[34] For Foucault, on the contrary, the general ideas that humanity has produced over the centuries are all false, since they are irreconcilable.

Let us return to the main thread of this study, which will lead us to the ideas of Foucault that have most interested his readers: knowledge, power, the formation of a human being as a subject, and liberty. Science, as we have said, is maintained and endures with no help of ideas from heaven, which does not exist. Foucault tells us that this is because science is elaborated within the constraints of an institution, that of university research, and has to conform strictly to a certain programme, for fear of being represented as not telling the truth.[35] It depends upon a set-up which, as we already know, is composed of rules, traditions, teachings, special buildings, institutions and powers, etc., and which sanctifies and perpetuates the prescriptions of science, 'the rules for the formation of statements that are accepted as scientifically true',[36] and the scientific 'game of truth', that of successes and discoveries and also errors that are rectifiable and may be rectified.

This whole set-up forms both 'science' as an object and individuals who will only recognize truth in whatever is said in conformity with the rules of an exact science. Those individuals adopt what some sociologists would call a social type, in other words the *role* of scientists. They internalize this role, model themselves on it and become subjects correlative to the object 'science'. Objectivization and subjectivization 'are not independent of one another; it is their mutual development and reciprocal connection that produce[37] the truth-games' that pick out the assertions that are reputed to be scientific. This is an ongoing development involving shifts[38] between subjects and objects that never cease to modify themselves and their relations to one another,[39] for it sometimes happens that a subject introduces a modification to the rules of truth-telling within the set-up or, if you

like, among the scientific community. The genealogy of science cannot be reduced simply to a history of great discoveries and scientific theories.[40] It is itself nothing less than this mutual genesis of the subject of science and the object of knowledge,[41] in which the set-up constitutes the interface. The scientist makes science and science makes the scientist.

Given that the social type of a scientist is empirical in origin, it clearly must be *constituted*, produced by the set-up. Even if his freedom as a researcher one day clashes with that set-up, that researcher is a product of what we may call subjectivization. But why add to the constituted object this subjectivization that goes with it? Not in order to submit the human subject, his thought and his freedom to the tyranny of the set-up, but so as to put an end to the fiction according to which the subject, the self, pre-dates his/her roles, for there is no subject 'in the wild state', untouched by any subjectivization: such a subject would be, not original, but hollow. Nowhere in history is any universal form of a pure subject to be found.[42]

The set-up and the scientist possess power over each other and science possesses power over society because it is reputed to tell the truth; the set-up, the subject, power and truth are thus linked. The power of knowledge is particularly strong in Westernized societies, but we should make no mistake about it: it is not exercised solely upon the military-cum-industrial complex or in the Commission for Atomic Energy! Medical power is not the same as the power of the law; it is the power of a branch of knowledge: doctors purge and bleed their patients because they know what to do, and the patient allows them to do it; when the Faculty of Medicine pronounces, one must bow to its wisdom.

However, power cannot be reduced to specialized forms of knowledge and institutions that possess a normative authority: medicine and its Ministry of Health, psychiatry and psychoanalysis – the human sciences.[43] Throughout the world, whatever is held to be true in a set-up has the power to win obedience and trains human beings to be obedient. It

is *true* that the power of the prince is legitimate and it is true that one must obey one's prince, whose faithful subject (in both senses of the word) one thus becomes.

All power, all authority, whether practical or spiritual, and all morality claims to stem from the truth, assumes this and is respected as being founded on truth. 'The most general problem in politics is that of the truth.' Sometimes a master or his advisers invent a new way of governing, which instantly becomes the true way, and as a result what is true and what is false are divided up differently. Sometimes what is invented is a new way of dividing things up, and this may persuade the master to govern in a new way.[44]

Let us recapitulate. There are two kinds of truth. What a sceptic thinker has to say and you are reading here, namely, that general truths are never true, is true in an absolute sense; but quantitatively this true truth represents very little. The vast majority of truths in the various periods are not true absolutely, but they nevertheless exist. They are 'of this world' and indeed one might in many cases say that they are all too true, since they are 'produced as a result of multiple constraints'. Because they are held to be true, these truths of 'discourses' have 'the effects peculiar to true "discourse" ';[45] since they are immanent in institutional, customary, didactic and legal etc. set-ups, they amount to far more than ideologies and superstructures! In the USSR and its satellites, they brought into being, justified and developed the whole socialist economy.[46]

Let me briefly sum up. The vast majority of truths are due to 'a collection of procedures organized for their production, establishment, circulation and functioning'. These truths are 'linked in a circular fashion to the systems of power that produce them and uphold them and that reconnect them with that power'. So the great political problem is not error, illusion, alienation or ideology: it is truth itself – which is why Nietzsche is so important.[47] It should be added that the role played by truth is particularly great in Western societies that produce scientific knowledge that is provisional in perpetuity, one accorded a universal value that is an integral

part of the history of the West.[48] That is certainly one path that it is possible to follow . . .

Some of you may find this a bitter pill to swallow. If you think that not all truths should be expressed and that values need to be saved, as the geese saved the Capitol (with the best of intentions), this is the point at which we must part company: for we have nothing left to say to one another. We are back with the old battle between, on the one hand, philosophy (unless it is Platonic), which desires at all costs to tell the truth, even at the cost of life itself and the world as it is; and, on the other hand, rhetoric, in other words propaganda, which, in order to be more convincing, bases itself on all the nonsense that people have in their heads, as Aristotle ironically put it.

If we prefer Aristotle, we should be able to see what is before our eyes: what do we see when we look at societies of other times and other places? Entire cultures and civilizations which amounted to so many masses of truths to which people adapted. We, who enjoy the same superiority over the past as living dogs enjoy over dead lions, may well enjoy scoffing at so many preconceptions: the sun moves round the earth, slavery is natural, as is racism, and Jupiter is a god. In 1801, witches were still being burnt at the stake in Europe.[49] But eventually we grow weary of scoffing, for there is no end to it. The fact is all of that most definitely did exist and affected even the best of minds, such as Descartes and Leibnitz. If we are to dismiss it all as illusion and error, we ought ourselves to be capable of doing better. To be sure, it was all founded upon nothing, nothing but its own 'discourse' and its own set-up, but are we now in a position that is any better? It might be more instructive to show through what genealogy nothingness became the reality of its day, as it is in our own time.

But where does that leave ourselves, we moderns? What are our 'discourses' on the various objects that make up our actuality? That is something that will only be discovered by those who, one day, will find themselves to be different. They will discover what was modern about us. We ourselves,

meanwhile, cannot foresee 'the figure that we shall cut in the future'. However, what we can glimpse is, if not what we are, at least what we are no longer.[50] Certain prejudices such as homophobia are fading away; we have realized how arbitrary such a mind-set is (the materiality of that incorporeal idea). But do we not have other prejudices? What are they? When we are gone, our grandchildren and great-nephews will know, once they have become different from us. In short, all that we know or shall ever know are differences.

8

A Sociological History of Truths: Knowledge, Power, the Set-up

What with the death of so many differences and the birth of new truths that one is not obliged to believe and that are destined to be rebutted, some people concluded that nothing true *existed*, 'whereas my problem is the reverse',[1] said Foucault: namely, to make out how a particular definition of madness came to enter a set-up that turned it into a reality, that is to say mental illness as it was conceived at that time, along with all the very real consequences represented by the ways of treating mad people.

Here is a quotation that says it all: 'Politics and the economy are not things that exist, or errors, or illusions, or ideologies. They are things that do not exist and yet which are inscribed in reality and fall under a regime of truth dividing the true and the false.'[2]

Foucault takes account of this social and institutional fabrication of received truths. Unlike Nietzsche, he is careful not to add that non-truth is one of the conditions of human existence. He does not generalize; nor does he turn to metaphysics, not even the metaphysics of the will to power.

A particular regime of truth and certain practices thus form a set-up of knowledge-cum-power which introduces into reality something which does not exist yet, in which it distinguishes between what is true and what is false. Hence

one of Foucault's favourite themes: once it has been constituted by a *concatenatio causarum* or the causality of historical becoming, 'discourse' imposes itself as a historical a priori;[3] and in the eyes of contemporaries, only those who speak in conformity with the 'discourse' of the moment will be said to tell the truth and will be accepted in 'the game of what is true and what is false'.[4] Meanwhile, however, discursive practices will be engaged in as a matter of course. That is what a civilization is. It is not hard to guess what we should think of our own. What Foucault produced was not a logical or philosophical theory of truth, but an empirical and almost sociological critique of *telling the truth*, that is to say the 'rules' for speaking truly, the rules of *Wahrsagen*.[5] He told me that Nietzsche was a philosopher not of the truth but of telling the truth.

Yet 'truth' is not an empty word. For '*if* one places oneself at the level of a proposition, within a "discourse", the distinction between what is true and what is false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable nor institutional nor violent'.[6] But it is only at that level that it is true and, as the late and lamented Dominique Janicaud pointed out, we are free to choose a different level,[7] that of the genealogy of the realities of a particular epoch, a level at which nothing resists. Nothing, that is to say (yet again), except singular, empirical facts that no sceptic has ever doubted (the innocence of Dreyfus, for a start); and also, except all that you have just read, namely, a genealogy, that truthful balance-sheet of 'discourses' and set-ups which, for their part, rest upon a void. This can be called truthful since, if truths are subject to the Nietzschean critique, truth still remains the condition for the possibility of that critique.

In 1978, Foucault said that the aim of all his work was 'to show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus [or set-up: *dispositif*] of knowledge-power'.[8] Whatever is believed to be true elicits obedience. Now let us return to this power: how does it relate to all this? It is relevant because the 'discourse' leaves its mark on reality and, in reality, power is everywhere, as

we shall soon see. Whatever is reputed to be true commands obedience. Power extends much further than psychiatric knowledge or the military use of science. Is what I do in my love life or elsewhere, what people do generally, and what the government does, good or bad – that is to say: does it conform to a particular distinction between what is true and what is false?

The fact is that, without any coercion, people do conform to rules and follow customs that they take for granted. If we refrain from entertaining too narrow or fantastical an idea of power, if we do not reduce it to the state, the central authority, that cold monster that some would say never ceases to expand, we shall be able to detect power everywhere. So what is this power that Foucault did not consider to be diabolical?[9] Let me sketch in a large-scale ideal type: it is the ability to control the behaviour of others without exerting physical pressure, to get people to walk without physically placing their feet and legs in the necessary positions. It is the most common and everyday thing and is to be found everywhere. There is power at work in a family, between two lovers, in the workshop and in one-way streets. Millions of little powers form the weft of society in which individuals constitute the warp. As a result, there is liberty everywhere because there is power everywhere.[10] Clearly, some people jib at the situation, while others go along with it.

Political philosophy is too often inclined to reduce power solely to the central authority, Leviathan, the beast of the Apocalypse. But power does not stem entirely from one detested point, 'it is conveyed by a capillary network so dense that one wonders if there is anywhere where power is not at work'.[11] The mechanic responsible for the Auschwitz railway line obeyed the Monster because his wife and children had the power to insist that the father of the family bring back a wage to the household. What make societies or, on the contrary, block them are just as much innumerable little powers as the action solely of the central power.[12] Leviathan would be powerless without that throng of tiny

Lilliputian powers – not because all power stems from the centre, or because it is everywhere, but because beneath it there would be nothing but shifting, ungraspable sand. As Napoleon said when he created the Legion of Honour and his regime of prominent citizens, you have to scatter a few rocks in the sand.

Nowhere can we escape from relations of power. On the other hand, always and everywhere, we can modify them. For power is part of a bilateral relationship. It is coupled with obedience that we are free (yes, free) to agree to with either a greater or a lesser degree of resistance.[13] But, of course, that freedom does not float in the void and cannot aim for absolutely anything at absolutely any given time. Liberty can bypass the set-up of the present moment, but what it bypasses is only that particular mental and social set-up. Ancient Christianity cannot be expected to have thought of abolishing slavery.

The set-up is not so much a determinism that produces us; rather, it is an obstacle against which our thoughts and liberty either do or do not react. They react against it because the set-up itself is active; it is an instrument 'with a degree of efficacy that brings about results and so produces something in society; it is destined to have some effect'.[14] It is not limited to affecting the objects of knowledge; it acts upon both individuals and society; but, of course, action also implies reaction. The 'discourse' commands, represses, persuades and organizes. It is 'the point of contact, chafing and possibly conflict' between the rules and individuals.[15] Its effects on knowledge can therefore be effects of power. Not that the truth-games are nothing but a disguise for power-games[16] but certain types of knowledge, in certain periods, our own included, may contract relations with certain powers. In Antiquity (good) knowledge was, as it were, the antithesis of (bad) power. Nowadays, power makes use of certain sciences and, more generally, presents itself as rational and informed.[17]

Freedom is a philosophical problem so confused that one needs to discuss it in concrete terms and give the word a

particular meaning: 'I believe in the freedom of individuals. In the very same situation, people may react very differently';[18] that's all there is to it. At that point, Foucault mumbled a disapproving word that might have been 'sociologist'. Power, thought and freedom are everywhere within the scientific community; conflicts may arise between a young researcher and 'the rules for forming statements that are accepted as being scientifically true'.[19] The human subject does not do the constituting, but is constituted, as is its object; but the subject is nevertheless free, thanks to his liberty, to react and then, thanks to his thinking, to step back for a longer view. The set-up is not so much a boundary to the initiative of subjects, but rather the obstacle against which that initiative manifests itself.[20] That is a conception of freedom that may seem close to that which Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phénoménologie de la perception*, defends against Sartre and his hollow freedom that faces no obstacle at all. But let us press on further: human beings never cease to be inventive and to create new things. Whatever a person's social or individual motives and motivations that, as we say, 'push' him or her, that person has to be free to allow himself/herself to be thus 'pushed' to create something new, instead of remaining trapped inside his/her discursive fishbowl.

Furthermore, an individual and his/her freedom can never be wiped out; they will always survive, even if they do so by becoming the opposite of themselves. Foucault never said or wrote that in so many words, but maybe his doctrine assumes it. 'Even in obedience, there is resistance,' Nietzsche wrote[21] in 1885. 'Nothing gives up its own power, and orders also include a measure of concession.' He also declared that freedoms 'struggle for power, not for existence; a vanquished man is not annihilated, but he is beaten down or subordinated; nothing is annihilated in the domain of the spirit (*es gibt im Geistigen keine Vernichtung*)'.[22] Every individual is a centre of energy that must either prevail or be vanquished; if the latter is the case, the energy turns into resentment or, on the contrary, faithful devotion to the victor, or both at

once, but that will to power is never neutralized or abolished.

It may become 'the opposite of itself provided it remains', as does self-esteem (*amour propre*) according to La Rochefoucauld, who also declares that a fool does not possess the strength to be good. Similarly, one could add, when one finds oneself in a position of rivalry with someone stronger than oneself, one has no choice: one becomes either his admirer or envious of him. Unless, that is, one has oneself backed off from any confrontation; in which case one can only feel disdain for the useless squabble and for both rivals. Likewise, finally, when one has borne up under misfortune or lived through years of pain with no remission, that experience, while weighing heavily upon one, does procure a positive sense of having grown in stature. Altruism or egoism, good fortune or bad: those are not necessarily the only alternatives.

Foucault claims to be 'horrified'[23] that some people thought he stood for 'the affirmation of a determinism from which there is no escape'. He constantly uses the word 'strategy', by which he means the outcome that one chooses in a struggle that is all about winning.[24] Indeed, 'thought',[25] which, as may be remembered, is itself a struggle, is free to stand back and consider its own constitution critically, stripping things of their misleading 'familiarity'.[26] Hence Foucault's critique of a certain form of sociologism. Of course, society does cramp us and determine us, but – he writes –

> It is necessary to free oneself from the sanctification of the social domain as the sole instance of reality and to cease to consider as no more than wind the thing that is essential in human life and in human relations, namely thought.[27]

For to challenge a 'discourse' and 'disqualify its declarations'[28] can help to topple the set-up that supports them.

The ridiculous thing is that the very same accusation as the one that he levelled at sociologism was levelled at this partisan of freedom,[29] namely, that of being deterministic.

At the time, Foucault was considered to be a structuralist: he bound people to the set-up and condemned 'their slightest innovations to conformity'.[30] His accusers were all the more indignant because, I fear, they half-shared the opinion that they attributed to Foucault, the accused; for our culture, a compound of humanism and sociologism, makes us at times celebrate the freedom of man, while at other times complaining that he is the victim of the sociological conditions that determine him.[31]

One variant of that complaint (or merit, in the eyes of some) was to regard Foucault as a structuralist, a negator of the human subject. This was an effect of modishness, or rather contemporary fashion: what was then known as structuralism and was on everyone's lips presupposed the negation of the subject. But to label Foucault as a structuralist was surely very surprising. Quite apart from the fact that the word 'structure' is nowhere to be found in his works, he believed, as we have seen, in the freedom of human subjects. He protested violently[32] against being assimilated to structuralism, but all to no avail. Student youth called him structuralist in order to honour him, just as, a quarter of a century earlier, they had stubbornly persisted in honouring Sartre with the then trendy label of existentialist, to which, as Simone de Beauvoir has told us, Sartre eventually resigned himself.

Yet there was a reason for the assimilation of Foucault to structuralism and to the vogue for structuralism itself: structuralism had helped to hatch out new ideas. Foucault believed in the historicity of truth-telling; he believed in singularity and in 'rarity'; on those three counts, he, like structuralism, acknowledged that thought does not solely engender itself and needs to be explained by something other than itself – according to Foucault by the prevailing 'discourse' and 'set-up', according to the structuralists by structures.

In truth, though, the two doctrines shared hardly anything in common apart from what they denied. Both claimed that between things and consciousness there was a *tertium quid*

that eluded the subject's sovereignty, an opacity that was more than the bad faith and ambiguity dear to Sartrean subtlety. Any kind of thought that rejected Marxism, phenomenology and philosophies of consciousness was assumed to be structuralist. For example, for different reasons, both structuralism and Foucault denied the opposition between explaining and understanding.[33] According to Foucault, the historical a priori, which is not so much a structure as a dispersion, affects us without our understanding it or even noticing it.

When structuralism was fertile . . .

When referring to structuralism, perhaps I should not have used words such as 'fashion' and 'modish'. It is pointless to satirize the mistakes of an age, as has been done for two millennia, or, as a latter-day Juvenal, to stigmatize the folly of the present moment. Furthermore, it is not clever to judge an intellectual movement by the word that is attached to it as a label, or to condemn it in the name of higher principles. For, shielded or lured on by that word, new ideas sprang up among the younger generation. Intellectual modes can be fertile, even if they are mistaken or confused about their principles. Young minds can only clear new paths through thickets that are as young as they are.

Structures and 'discourse' stemmed neither from Husserl nor from Marx; and not from humanism. And, around 1970, that was quite enough to warrant being viewed with a jaundiced eye by historians of society and philosophers of consciousness and the subject. Foucault and structuralism were seen as one and the same heresy. Meanwhile, though, for others, both aroused excitement at the dawning of something new.

For some, structuralism came as a fertilizing shock. In this connection, let me evoke a few old memories, for the microhistory of individuals makes it possible to test the texture of

more collective effects. Half a century or more ago, when I was a teacher of ancient history, I listened to the confidences of a student who was at the time a Communist but also a reader of *L'Etre et le Néant*, and who has since become a famous Orientalist. In 1955, his Sartro-Marxist convictions had been challenged by a text in which Claude Lévi-Strauss analysed the system of body-painting in an Amazonian tribe. By studying those images, one could see how a kind of combination of structures could be enough to explain the diversity of a slice of reality.

The effect of this was a flash of enlightenment: so not everything could be reduced to society or consciousness – there was a third villain at large, a *tertium quid*. In its day, structuralism may have made it possible to escape from the sempiternal dialogue between subject and object without, however, falling into sociologism.

Slipping through the gap (tiny, to be sure, but the young live on very little) between Marxism and Sartrism, my confidant, who was making me think, began to look about and find, on all sides, other examples of that *tertium*. For example, why should linguists not be structuralists? The arbitrariness of signs and grammatical structures imposes itself on a subject, my young friend told me: no intentional and Husserlian consciousness affects the fact that water is called *eau* in France and *wasser* in Germany. As both Joseph Stalin and Raymond Queneau wrote, in whose interest would it be for water not to be called *eau*? Not everything in structuralism is necessarily ridiculous!

There was, similarly, no denying that class differences and oppression have been a constant feature of history; but the class *struggle* was not: in many cases, the oppressed had not noticed their oppression, so did not struggle; the fact that, in every period, people could not see what was so obvious was incomprehensible. That, said my young friend, in his own terms, was a brutal and absurd fact, a *materiality* that was contrary to Marx's materialism (true enough; and it anticipated the materiality of incorporeals in Foucault).

My student in the faculty of letters then proceeded to mock his professor of comparative grammar, whom his fellow disciples admired for the ingenuity with which he explained the anomalies of Latin syntax by the psychology of its speakers. Turning to phonetics, this student denied that phonetic changes resulted from an extremely understandable quest for a way of reducing the muscular effort of the mouth, as he had been taught: the turn from one sound to another may operate in the reverse direction in another language. My young man was ready to read Troubetskoï and Henri Martinet.

Finally, he learnt that, in Egyptian art, the convention was always to represent the human figure in profile, except for the shoulders and bust, which were seen from the front.[34] Leafing through Malraux, he also noticed that other civilizations (African and Mayan arts) each had their own conventional image of the human body and that this arbitrary plastic sign expressed neither the intentions of the artist nor the mind-set of the society; it was just a feature of the language and there was nothing to be learnt from it. He was now ready to read Wölfflin.

One can see that a sense of analogy had prompted my confidant to apply a similar heuristic method, seeking a *tertium quid*, in a number of different disciplines. So it is understandable that, as *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) shows, in the eighteenth century one and the same 'discourse' reappeared in natural history, grammar and political economics. The zeitgeist and Spengler had nothing to do with this, for the spirit of the age, in this case, was nothing more than a kind of analogical contagion that does sometimes occur. More recently, we have noticed the same kind of contagion affecting the vogue for the 'linguistic turn'.

Allow me to introduce a parenthesis at this point. Since I have burnt my boats and mentioned his name, there was once a structuralist who did not know he was one and whose name is seldom mentioned: Heinrich Wölfflin. 'You should read him, he's the Foucault of the history of art,' I suggested one evening to my interested student. For Wölfflin too had

discovered a new scientific object, one so omnipresent and obvious in works of art that it passed unseen: namely, features, not of style or expression, but of a plastic 'language', features that belong to a whole epoch or a whole group of 'locutors'. In between works of art, on the one hand, and, on the other, the intentions and expressions of the artist (or, through him, those of society), there is a *tertium quid* that is 'the general plastic form of an epoch' and that is to be found 'beneath any individual'.[35] Its transformations present the eye with a succession of human forms painted on Greek vases from the seventh century BC to the fifth, and from Graeco-Roman sculpture through to that of the Middle Ages, the Italian Renaissance and the Baroque period: new images of the human body, a transition from a closed form to an open one, from linear to pictorial, and so on. All these and many other aspects of the language of plasticity are illuminated by the dazzling analyses of Wölfflin's *Concepts fondamentaux de l'histoire de l'art* and *Renaissance et baroque.*

Wölfflin describes 'a specific evolution of forms'.[36] We need to distinguish between 'art as a history of expression and art as an internal history of form'. For 'however meritorious the efforts to relate the ceaseless change in forms to changes in the surrounding world may be to any explanation of the physiognomy of a work of art, and however indispensable the human character of an artist and the social and mental structure of an epoch may be, we nevertheless should not forget that a creative imagination of forms possesses a life and development of its own'. So 'we should not interpret everything uniformly in terms of expression; the history of art is not purely and simply identical to the history of civilization'. Wölfflin writes, using almost the same words as Foucault: 'Not absolutely everything is possible at absolutely any time.'[37] Wölfflin was accused of 'eliminating the subject and personality' and of reducing the history of art to an impersonal process, 'a history with no proper names'.[38] The same reproach was to be levelled at Foucault, in practically the same terms.

Yes, Foucault does believe in the subject that is man

Yet Foucault, in his doctrine, never ruled out proper names. 'I have not denied – far from it – the possibility of changing "discourse": I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it.'[39] For, far from being sovereign, a free subject is constituted in a process that Foucault dubbed 'subjectivization': a subject is not 'natural'; in each age he is modelled by the 'discourses' and set-up of the day, by the reactions of his individual liberty and by whatever 'aestheticizations' he may undergo. (I shall have more to say about this.) Foucault told me that the question of the subject spilled more blood in the sixteenth century than the class struggle did in the nineteenth. According to Lucien Febvre, what was at stake in the Religious Wars was the possibility of Protestants constituting themselves as religious subjects who could accede to God without the mediation of the Church, priests or confessors. It was around 1980, as we have noted, that Foucault discovered the third panel to his investigations.[40] 'True knowledge' and 'power' were now joined by the constitution of a human subject who needed to behave ethically in a particular way, either as a loyal vassal or a citizen or whatever.

The constitution of a subject is accompanied by the constitution of his manners: one behaves and sees oneself as a faithful vassal, a loyal subject or a good citizen, and so on. The same set-up that constitutes its objects (madness, flesh, sex, the physical sciences, governmentalism, etc.) makes the *self* of each individual into a particular subject. Physics makes a physicist. Just as, without a 'discourse', there would be no known objects for us, similarly there would be no human subject without a process of 'subjectivization'. The subject, engendered by the set-up of his period, is not sovereign but a child of his time. One cannot become absolutely any subject at absolutely any time. On the other hand, one can react to objects and, thanks to thought, one can step

back and gain a perspective on them – on religion as constituted by the Church and the clergy, for example.

So man has never ceased 'to constitute himself in the infinite and multiple series of different subjectivities that will never come to an end' and we never come 'face to face with something that is man. [. . .] When speaking of the death of man[41] in a confused and simplificatory fashion, that is what I meant.'[42] The notion of subjectivization serves to eliminate metaphysics, that empirico-transcendental doublet that extracts from the constituted subject the phantom of a sovereign subject.

In their own particular way, sociologists profess the same doctrine: all individuals are socialized. According to Foucault, subjectivization fills the same position in society as does Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: both provide a link between the social domain and the individual; as does also the sociological notion of roles, which we should pause to consider further. Around 1940, Linton and Merton used the word 'roles' to describe a range of positions in society, each with a status, rights and duties, positions that are constantly occupied by a succession of individuals. The sociological usefulness of this idea is undeniable, although it is symptomatic that those sociologists resorted to the word 'role', a fact that others have criticized because it seems to suggest that the individual remains aloof from his position and does no more than go along with a social drama with which he does not identify. Nevertheless, the word is revealing, as it underlines our tendency to separate the subject, the self, from its content and turn it into an empty form ready to be set up as a transcendental doublet of the empirical subject.

It seems to me that we should distinguish between, on the one hand, subjectivization, a kind of socialization, and, on the other hand, a different process that Foucault calls 'aestheticization', by which he meant, not the constitution of the subject, or some aestheticism for dandies, but the initiative of 'a transformation of oneself by oneself'.[43] It was around 1980 that Foucault realized that, over and above techniques

applied to things and those directed towards other people, some societies, such as those of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, practised techniques that worked on the self.[44] Using the word 'aestheticization', he found – I imagine – that he could emphasize the spontaneity of this initiative, spontaneity being the opposite of subjectivization. This theory of the self working on the self delighted many people, who thought that Foucault was providing us with a morality for our epoch. Of course, as soon as it is a matter of morality, many people do sit up and take notice. But was that really what Foucault originally meant? Was he playing the guru? We shall consider that question later. Right now, let us address the most immediate question.

Like revolt or submission, this aestheticization is initiated by freedom. Different types of human beings, styles of life such as stoicism, monasticism, puritanism and militancy are, I take it, all so many forms of aestheticization. They do not constitute ways in which the set-up or the objectivizations of the environment impose themselves. Or, at least, they 'add to' that process; so they can be considered as individual inventions and choices that do not actually impose themselves.

Pasquale Pasquino and Wolfgang Essbach have quite legitimately likened Foucault's version of aestheticization to what Max Weber, following Nietzsche, called *ethos*.[45] However, Weber used that word to designate both free aestheticizations and imposed subjectivizations. His famous text on the origins of capitalism does not teach that religion influenced the economy, rather than the reverse; but that an *ethos*, that of a hard-working Puritan, frugal, ascetic and honourable in business, was invented on the basis of what could be called a lure, to wit Calvinism. Subsequently, this *ethos*, this personal style, spread as a notion through the business world in a somewhat limited version that was reduced to 'an ends rationality', which was less ascetic. It was no longer completely self-sufficient but was founded upon a quest for revenue and profit, success in business constituting a sign of being one of the Lord's elect. In his *Les Caves du Vatican*,

Gide gave one of his heroes, a Protestant businessman, the name Profitendieu.

Aestheticization, a particular style of life that had proved to have its uses, now turned into a subjectivization that was a correlative of 'capitalism' (or of an entrepreneurial economy, as Schumpeter put it), in which two realities find themselves mutually attracted: on the one hand, the agents of the new economy; on the other hand, the 'capitalist' economy that the Puritan *ethos* helped – unwittingly or even unwillingly – to create.[46] But it is important to cite the terms that Weber himself used: '*Der Puritaner* wollte *Berufsmensch sein, – wir müssen es sein*', 'A Puritan *wished* to be a man with a vocation and a profession [this is aestheticization], we *have* to be this [this is the subjectivization that is engendered and demanded by an entrepreneurial economy]; such is our *ständige Lebensfürung*,[47] "the moral of our status".' It should be added that a subject who aestheticizes himself freely and actively, through certain practices upon himself, is still a child of his time: for those practices are not 'something that the individual himself invents; they are schemata that he finds in his culture',[48] in Calvinism, for example.

We should clearly not ascribe to Foucault, a great reader of Seneca, any plan to popularize a Stoic aestheticization inspired by the Greeks. In the last interview that he managed to give before he died, he expressed himself very clearly, declaring that one never finds the solution to a present-day problem by seeking the answer supplied by another epoch, which was clearly responding to a quite different question. Problems do not remain the same over centuries; the eternal return is also an eternal departure (he loved these observations of René Char). The affinity between Foucault and ancient morality is based on a single detail: the work of the self upon the self, or a 'style'. Here, 'style' does not mean distinction or dandyism. 'Style' takes on the meaning that the word held for the Greeks, for whom an artist was first and foremost an artisan or craftsman. The idea of a style of existence, and therefore of the self working on the self, played a key role in the conversations and, no doubt,

the inner life of Foucault, in the last months of a life that only he knew was threatened. The human subject, taking himself as the *oeuvre* upon which to work, gave himself a morality that was no longer upheld by God or tradition or reason.

This theory of subjectivization and aestheticization clearly indicates what Foucault's project was: to 'problematize' an object, find out how a human being was envisaged in a particular epoch (a task that he called archaeology), analyse (the task of genealogy, in the Nietzschean sense of the word), and describe the various social practices – scientific, ethical, punitive, medical and so on – that determined how a human being was envisaged.[49] His archaeology seeks not to distinguish any universal structure or a priori, but instead to reduce everything to events that cannot be universalized. And his genealogy traces everything back to an empirical occurrence: contingency has always made us be what we were or are: 'Something that has not always existed; in other words, it is always as a result of coincidences and chance happenings, in the course of a fragile, precarious history, that things that seem to be the most obvious took shape.'[50]

A transcendent and transcendental problem: Husserl

Now we have reached the heart of the problem. Foucault's genealogical critique seeks to find out how things empirically came to be, not what their origin or bases were.[51] It sets out to 'free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence'.[52] Can a trans-historical Husserlian subject account for the historicity of reason? For a reader of Nietzsche, the subject, reason and even truth all have a history and are not due to the effects of an origin.[53]

According to Foucault, the philosophy of his youthful years claimed that empirical, historical man was 'the basis of his own finitude'. As we have seen, the positivities of 'discourses', all dated and enfolded by a particular epoch,

make man a finite being, circumscribed by historical time. The fallacy of metaphysics is to believe that very finitude makes that historicity possible. That amounts to setting up finitude, which is the immanent character of man's empirical condition, as the condition for the possibility of transcendence. And that constitutes 'a repetition of what is positive in what is fundamental', a 'historico-transcendental doublet' that would be assumed to harbour a meta-empirical origin or the authentic essence of human beings: readers will by now have spotted the transcendental Ego, the Heideggerian freedom to see the truth, the Husserlian origin of geometry . . .

According to Foucault, not a man to back off from blasphemy, those illustrious doctrines constitute a pure and simple 'tautology', a 'paralogism'[54] produced by a reflexive analysis. This presents conditions of possibility that are too general, that pounce on a shadow but miss the prey; whereas Foucault, as a good positivist, seeks out the particular conditions of reality, namely, 'discourses' and their respective set-ups. Nothing exists except that which is empirical and historical or, at any rate, nothing authorizes us to declare that the transcendent or even the transcendental exists.[55] As a young philosopher, Foucault set out to 'free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence'.[56] In so doing, he broke away from his original colleagues and, as Passeron puts it, orphaned himself from any philosophical father in order to remain faithful to his love of singularities.

The young orphan did not want to start off with a theory of the subject, 'as one could in phenomenology or existentialism'; nor, on the basis of such a theory, to infer how, 'for example, a particular form of knowledge was possible'. On the contrary, he wished to show how the subject was constituted 'through a number of practices that were truth-games, – the practices of power, etc.'.[57] Foucault recognizes that man takes initiatives, but denies that he does so thanks to the presence of the *logos* within him or that his initiative may lead to the end/goal of history or to pure truth. The discoveries of physicists are not inspired by a teleology of

science;[58] the language and etymology of Greek or German words do not disclose the truth of being; Napoleon was not a harbinger of Spirit; a rebel is not moved by an urge to dis-alienate himself, prompted by his native essence.[59] Nothing is transcendent or even, in the Kantian sense, transcendental. Nor is there any accessible eschatology – neither in Marx's revolution nor in Auguste Comte's positivist age.[60] That is why 'the task of liberty is indefinite'.[61] The subject is not a major 'fold' in Being.[62] As readers have already seen, an individual possesses a kind of freedom, but this does not dominate everything from above; it is a 'concrete liberty'[63] that can only react against its context of the moment. We must give up the hope of ever acceding to a point of view that might afford us access to a complete and definite knowledge of our historical limits.

This is a way of thinking that has become familiar since the 1860s when, it would appear, our modernity began, incorporating a sense of history, the sensational discoveries of Orientalism and a critical history of the origins of Christianity which probed right to the heart of our idea of ourselves. To be sure, we have always been aware that the truth varies, but mostly geographically: there is truth this side of the Pyrenees or the River Halys, but error beyond. The diversity of laws and mores is the age-old argument on which scepticism is based. And to that diversity, Sextus Empiricus added the diversity of all the differences between beliefs and philosophies that he contrasted to one another. The argument had been familiar ever since Montaigne. But from the 1860s onward, the past, seriously overflowing from the summary framework provided by the *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, became a huge part of our collective knowledge. In 1931, Albert Thibaudet, a philosophy graduate, struck a prophetic note when he wrote as follows:

> The mind of a critical historian is a mind neutralized in order to search for the truth and one that profits from not being extended by the mind of a critical philosopher that would raise the question: 'What is the truth?'[64]

Clearly, that is a question which, far from being original, is already more than a century old, but for us it was simply one that was familiar. The dominant doctrines of the day (Marxism, phenomenology, and philosophies of consciousness) were concerned with something quite different: a quest for the absolute. However, the question, 'What is the truth?' became acute with Foucault's 'discourses' and – even more, perhaps – with his 'set-ups'. Through those set-ups, what we call 'society' dictates what, for a particular time and in a particular place, is telling-the-truth and what is telling-falsehoods.[65] In short, Foucault's entire *oeuvre* is a continuation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*. It tries to show that every concept believed to be eternal has a history; it 'came to be' and its origins were in no sense sublime. In these circumstances, how could Foucault possibly not have claimed to be a sceptic? In his personal notebooks, Nietzsche did at one point express the hope to have disciples who would follow in his footsteps.[66]

9

Was Foucault a Corrupter of the Young? Was He the Despair of the Workers' Movement?

To many minds that have their own reasons for not being Nietzschean (in the 1990s, they certainly caused some uneasy moments for structuralism), Foucault's vision of the world is false and repugnant. Some fear that the end of transcendences constitutes a nihilist dissolvent that corrupts the young. As a result, among the various tribes of philosophers, there are two particular enemy species: on the one hand, those who, in the domain of thought, delight in bringing to light truths that are seldom edifying; on the other hand, those who defend life as it is lived, against the former group, either because they really do fear life to be under threat or else simply because of their indignation. One day, when one of the latter group presumed to lecture Foucault, his colleague, who belonged to the former category, he found himself dismissed as a *flic* (a police-pig). Foucault selected the sharp monosyllable as though it were a citation, sensuously delighting in making the sound click against his teeth, and producing a considerable echo within the walls of the Collège de France, where the word had never been heard before.

But was there really a threat here? It is pointless to argue in the face of repugnance, but I would suggest that people are getting distressed over nothing. None of our opinions as to what is true, what is good or what is normal have any

foundation, but that does not stop us from living normally or even believing in normality, the Good and Truth. Philosophy has never had the power to make people despair. We know of the strong emotion that Nietzsche, in his old age and by then a prophet, deployed against nihilism, that 'rejection of value and meaning' (which was quite the opposite to his own elitist naturalism),[1] and on the subject of truth that kills.[2] Notwithstanding, though, nobody died and sceptic thinkers do not hesitate when it comes to casting their vote either for Ségolène or for Sarkozy. When Nietzsche so passionately exalted life and the innocence of becoming and recommended that it be accepted, even with all its atrocities and tragedies, he was prescribing a horse-doctor's remedy for an imaginary illness. His fulminations against nihilism belong more to the order of oratory than to that of reality.

The only people who might have had reason to be alarmed were professors with an inflated idea of the importance of what they preach and satirical essayists who enjoy frightening themselves. Gaston Bachelard used to say that the world in which one thinks is not the world in which one lives. The end of the age in which people believed in transcendences is an event that is confined to the mind and there is nothing catastrophic about it. It might have been catastrophic if people were totally intellectual beings who governed themselves solely on the basis of reasons,[3] for example, if subjects or citizens obeyed the king or the state because some religion or ideology had persuaded them to do so.

I am in a position to testify that Foucault was not the devil that some (by no means negligible) figures believed him to be.[4] They thought that his scepticism undermined what was Good and normal and that his sole aim was to ruin all morality and normality. That was not at all the case: all he did was propose a few detailed reforms to the established order (such as the suppression of the death sentence) and he never advocated either anarchy or debauchery. But it is not hard to see the source of that misapprehension. Most people believe that one only respects values that one holds valid;

one only obeys what one believes to be true. However, not everyone holds that belief: a philosophical mind, even if it is sceptical, can do perfectly well without the illusion of true bases and still live without killing or robbing anyone, or even advocating murder and theft. To do so, the philosopher would, after all, have to believe in what he was doing.

Hume rightly declared that scepticism was not likely to dog our every step in daily life, indeed could not possibly do so: people will continue to play backgammon, enjoy conversation and believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, for nature is the strongest of forces. Only a Stoic could imagine that, by deeply absorbing the idea that love is no more than two epidermises rubbing together (as Marcus Aurelius put it, in even cruder terms), he could become master of his own libido. Nature wins out, I imagine, even in our choice of reading. We suspend disbelief when we read philosophers, for they are so interesting and intelligent (St Augustine, among others, as readers will remember). 'Gueroult's monumental work has discouraged people from reading Fichte,' Foucault said one evening, 'yet there must still be interesting things to find in Fichte.' Being a sceptic does not stop one from being human and, according to Husserl himself, the fundamental instincts of human beings are those of gregariousness, self-preservation and also curiosity.[5]

Human beings are more humdrum than metaphysical (and no, that is not a general anthropological proposition of the kind that I have condemned as pointless; it is more of a proverb or at least a would-be proverb). To be a sceptic is to have a divided mind, but that does not stop one from having a good life, and is only perilous on paper. One can be without illusions and be all the more resolute on that account, which was certainly the case of Foucault. What does it matter what the future will think of us? Actuality is the stuff of our temporality. Consider our students: they do study Plato, but they tend to be more enthusiastic about living philosophers, those of their own time. And consider artists: they all do the same thing at the same time, namely, whatever is being done at that very moment.

It is worth pointing out the pivotal role played by actuality, which is more decisive in human temporality than either the past or the future (although Heidegger, Gadamer and Sartre might not altogether agree with that) – a pivotal role that also affects morality. Consider the end of slavery or the end of colonization.[6] Around 1850 and then around 1950, there were changes in the fishbowls. The old fishbowl, with its 'discourse' on slaves and colonies, became decrepit in the current set-up and, retrospectively, seemed as outdated as oil-lamps or sailing vessels; and meanwhile, quite rightly, slavery and colonies appeared, in the new fishbowl, to be completely unjust. Around 1960, the colonization of Algeria had become decrepit and a Utopian fantasy in the eyes of both De Gaulle and Raymond Aron (those 'colonies', with their 'natives'! Even the very words were outdated). In the eyes of leftists, colonization was quite simply intolerable. Changes in a 'discourse' can thus produce the illusion that an imperious and intemporal ethical consciousness may have made progress.

Can humanity ever do without myths such as the myths of that consciousness and that progress? I do not know, but it does not seem to wish to, nor does it seem to wish to reject either religiosity or philosophical curiosity. Despite all the Nietzsches and Foucaults in the world, it likes to invoke Truth and considers the truth to be whatever it believes. 'Myths' is a word overloaded with multiple meanings, so let us rather speak of 'lures'. Calvinism was the lure for the capitalist entrepreneurial economy. The word 'lure' was from time to time used by Foucault himself and one is tempted to press him to say what the foremost benefit of aestheticization is: aestheticizations do not answer any need (rather, they create one); nor do they aim for any particular result. The ends that they claim to pursue are mere pretexts: salvation, tranquillity for the soul, nirvana and so on. Their energy stems from their liberty, from an impulse from the self, from the mysterious, intimate 'black box' of an individual, rather than from any persuasive doctrine; such a

doctrine simply serves as a lure, a rationalization and a training ground.

In 1968, Foucault, then a professor in Tunis, witnessed and took part in a student movement that claimed to stem from Marxism. A general strike was followed by police repression (in which Foucault was seriously ill-treated) and mass arrests. This episode affected Foucault profoundly and later he spoke of it with considerable emotion. He had detected in it 'proof of a need for a myth, some kind of spirituality' that creates 'a taste, a capacity and a possibility for an absolute sacrifice that can in no way be suspected of the slightest ambition or desire for power or profit'.[7] In truth, 'the Marxist training undergone by the Tunisian students was not very profound, nor did it show any signs of becoming more so'.[8] The detailed theory of Marxism and its scientific character were, for them, 'totally secondary questions that functioned more as a lure than as a behavioural principle'. A lure consists of bad reasons (but possibly also of some good ones?) that one gives to justify what one wishes to do. If an old lady condemns the death sentence for a collection of bad, naive reasons, she is nevertheless right, as she sees it, to do so.[9] She knows what she wants. In the practical field of action, Foucault's brand of irrationalism leads to individuals taking decisions for themselves.

In politics, decide what you want, but do not preach about it

The fact is that, alongside the genealogist-historian upon whom we have so far concentrated, there always was a militant in Foucault (a militant whose agenda was by no means that ascribed to the legendary sixty-eighter). I have suggested that the minds of us moderns are entangled with the sadness of a historian faced with the cemetery of defunct certainties and the imperious way in which life goes on. Foucault resolved that contradiction by purely and simply slicing through the Gordian knot. Just think of the rule that he had

made for himself: 'Do not use thought to confer the value of truth upon a political practice.'[10]

Foucault's decisionism dispensed him from founding his militant actions on truth, or on doctrine. And the scholar that he was never preached politics in either his lectures or his books. His own political choices did not always coincide with his books or his teaching. But the fact remains that his genealogical history did lay bare the arbitrary nature of all institutions and the gratuitous nature of all certainties, so that his readers and audience could find in it plenty of reasons to militate against the established order, on any point they wished to. It may be that Foucault, the scholar, silently derived a certain satisfaction from this.

That first rule, cited above, was immediately followed by a second: 'Do not use political action to discredit a line of thought as though it were pure speculation.' As Jean-Claude Passeron explains, Foucault was not recommending a thinker to have two different policies at once; rather, he was arguing in favour of a clear articulation between two incommensurable practices: scientific or philosophical analysis can motivate political activities[11] and so should not be scorned.[12] Passeron, who was close to Foucault, tells us that 'he never concealed from the most rational of his friends that his political rebellions were primarily impulses of the heart, nor from those who attacked his profession that his most apoplectic reactions were prompted by philosophical questioning'.

'A critique is here understood to be an analysis of the historical conditions according to which relations to the truth, rules and oneself are formed.'[13] Foucauldism is a critique of actuality that is careful not to dictate prescriptions for action, but does provide a degree of understanding. Thus, in the year of his death, he was moved to propose a new conception of philosophy, one that he reckoned to stem from Kant (although he had already been thinking about this for fifteen years, as can be seen from a hesitant page in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*).[14] In a little work entitled 'What is the Enlightenment?', the German philosopher of the Enlightenment tried to characterize his own times. In this

essay, the *Aufklärung* is called by that very name. The men of one particular century, the eighteenth, were able to refer to themselves as 'we, the men of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment' and they felt that they were different from their ancestors. Kant does not set out to characterize his epoch in itself; rather, he looks for a difference: what difference does *today* introduce in relation to *yesterday*?[15]

According to Foucault, what is understood to be philosophy could from now on consist, at every moment, not in producing a scientific exegesis of the past, not in contemplating totality or the future, but in describing actuality and, in default of doing any better, even characterizing it in a negative fashion and 'diagnosing the present, saying what the present is and explaining how our present is different, absolutely different from everything else'.[16] Foucault could now conceive of no possible philosophy except such a historical critique. Nothing else would be of any value in this epoch of ours: 'What does philosophy amount to today – I mean philosophical activity – if not thought working critically upon itself?'[17]

As we have seen, we do all our thinking within a 'discourse' that cannot ever know itself but at least enables us to realize that we think differently from the way that people used to think in the past. Better still, we may decide simply to work on a genealogy or archaeology and thereby glimpse the possibility of standing back to get a better perspective on ourselves and our today.[18] Such an undertaking creates an abyss beneath our feet: all we know is that 'we *are* difference'.[19] Such an endeavour of differentiation is more than history; it deserves the name of philosophy because, negatively, it is a meditation on ourselves and also because it stimulates us to react. The fact is that archaeological history sows seeds of doubt; a fissure or 'virtual fracture'[20] runs across our 'self' and through the things we think we know: don't touch, they are cracked. Or, on the contrary, go ahead: do touch, if you want to – this new philosophy is 'history that is indispensable to politics'.[21]

This new philosophy effects in words what freedom can accomplish any day: it makes us think, react, actively question[22] the position that the set-up has created for us.[23] This differential ontology of ourselves constitutes a historical exegesis of our limits that makes it possible for us to pass beyond them.[24] 'The effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks and so enable it to think differently, [. . .] instead of legitimating what is already known',[25] as the old philosophy all too often did. A genealogy of rationality undermines certainties and dogmatisms better than any ratiocination would.[26] Foucault is eager 'to peel away a few certainties' and show that what is has not always been, might well not be and is simply the product of a few flukes and a precarious history.[27] Philosophy becomes 'a permanent critique of our historical being' and restarts 'the indefinite work of liberty',[28] a historicity that does not lead to any end/goal.

A critique, that is all: nothing more positive. We can acquire scientific knowledge of the past development of the human race, and we can bring doubt to bear upon our present, but we shall still not possess any positive science of humanity that covers its destiny and its waywardness. And that is perhaps due to the very being of man, an erratic animal about which all we can know is his history, a negativity without any totality. This Foucault is a distant follower of the Enlightenment and a disciple who is closer to the Voltairian Nietzsche of *Daybreak* or *The Gay Science*; he casts upon errors, illusions and lures a light strong enough to kill them.

However, as a thinker, he will go no further; he does not finish them off with his own hand. As a man and a militant, Foucault was not a 'sixty-eighter' any more than he was a structuralist. He believed neither in Marx nor in Freud; neither in the Revolution nor in Mao. In private, he laughed at worthy progressive ideas and I never knew him to take a principled stand on the vast problems of the third world, the consumer society, capitalism or American imperialism. For, here again, human finitude creates havoc, irremediably sepa-

rating the scholar from the partisan. Here, a surprise awaits us: Foucault tacitly opposed Raymond Aron, but the more radical of the two was not the one you might think. Aron did not believe that the separation between a scholar and a man of politics ran as deep as Max Weber thought it did; he considered Max Weber to be too much of a nominalist. It was the so-called extremist of Vincennes who believed that chasm to be irremediable.

Foucault declared that since all things have been made, 'they can be unmade, provided one knows how they were made'. But the genealogical 'descriptions' that Professor Foucault presented to his many listeners never – he claimed – 'had the value of prescriptions':[29] anyone could use them as he saw fit. 'An intellectual's role is to overturn whatever we believe to be self-evident and to dissipate what we take for granted; it is not to shape the political will of others or to tell them what they ought to do. By what right would he do so?';[30] 'it is ludicrous to . . . try to dictate to others'.[31] Every year, at the beginning of his course of lectures, the professor would say, 'This, *grosso modo*, is how it seems to me that things have happened, but I will never say: this is what you should do, or this is good, that is not.'[32]

Although a genealogist cannot tell others what to want, he can, however, 'teach people what they do not know about their own situation, their working conditions and their exploitation'. This truth-game would stand in opposition to the truth-game of the exploiters.[33] At the beginning of another lecture,[34] what he said, in substance, amounted to the following:

> I shall not tell you that this is the fight in which you must engage, for I cannot see on what basis I could say that, except possibly as an aesthetic criterion (in other words, without any reason or possible justification apart from it being what I want, which is something that one can argue about no more than about tastes or colours). On the other hand, what I shall do is describe the actual 'discourse' of power, in the same way as I would set a strategic map before you. If you wish

> to fight and depending on what battle you choose, you will see from this 'map' where the points of resistance lie and where there are possible ways to breach them.

Foucault's relationship with his listeners was that of an adviser with his prince. The prince would say, 'I want the well-being of my peoples.' Then his wise adviser would say, 'If that is your decision, these are the means that you should adopt to achieve your ends.' Not all political reflection is impossible; but once the ends are decided upon freely or as the result of a royal whim, all that reflection can bear upon is the rationality of means, not the impossible rationality of the ends themselves. This is not because judgements of fact ('this is racism') are not the same as value-judgements (it is bad to be racist) and it is not possible to infer an 'ought' from an 'is'; rather, it is because of the limitations of human nature.

Each person is responsible for knowing and wanting what he or she wants, without shifting that responsibility on to the Tablets of Law or whatever stems from them: nature, tradition, authority, ideals, utility, innateness, sympathy, categorical imperatives, or a sense of history. Foucault limited himself to saying that his own opinions, adopted stances and interventions were personal choices on his part, choices that he neither justified nor sought to impose, for no reasoning could prove that they were right. 'I do not put myself forward as a universal combatant [. . .] If I do fight for one cause or another, I do so because that cause is important to me in all my subjectivity.'[35] He took militant action against the high-security quarters in French prisons, which he considered intolerable; and 'When a thing is intolerable, you cannot tolerate it' was the conclusion that he drew in order to cut short philosophical commentaries on his own political idiosyncrasy (as Passeron put it). However, in Vincennes, there were those who deplored the capricious elements in his choices of action and his refusals to take action.

One evening, Foucault and I were watching a report on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on his tiny television set. A

militant from one of the camps (never mind which) appeared on the screen and declared, 'Ever since my childhood, I have been fighting for my cause; that's the way it is, that's the way I am; there is no more to be said about it.' 'At last, there you have it!' shouted Foucault, only too glad to be dispensed from listening to chatter that would be useful only as rhetoric or propaganda. Imagine for a moment a city in which important ideas were discussed as little as aesthetic preferences: Byzantium without its Byzantine quarrels . . . I, for my part, am an Americanophile and a supporter of both nuclear energy and bull-fighting;[36] but why should I burden those around me with all my good reasons?

However, we seldom abstain from justifying ourselves to ourselves. We generally go along with what Foucault called 'a wish for truth'. Sometimes we are content to announce our choice as a raw fact: a patriot may say, 'My country, right or wrong.' But, more usually, he will feel the need to assert that his country is in the right or that the truly moral course to take is to defend one's country – such is the strength of our desire for the truth. To cite St Augustine,[37] 'Because truth is loved, all which love any other thing would gladly have that to be the truth, which they so love.' Needless to say, our justifications are sophisms. We judge the truth according to the choices that we make rather than make those choices in accordance with the truth, and our choices then make certain aims clear.[38] That is what all of us do, including the many defenders of *logos*, truth, reason and understanding. As Spinoza told us,[39] we do not desire something because we judge it to be good; we judge it to be good because we desire it.

That desire for the truth will no doubt seek to reassure itself, for it may become an instrument of power or propaganda; and we are all aware of the power of language.[40] Furthermore, the desire for truth is contingent; it is more marked in the West than elsewhere and is organized into powerful, official and imperious branches of learning. However, some minds avoid the desire for truth – not so much philosophers with their *logos*, but men associated

with Dumézil's second function, warriors, with all their ardour, anger and *thymos*.[41] Foucault was a warrior and a warrior does not make fine speeches or plead that he is in the right. He is not indignant, but angry; he has espoused his cause, or rather it has espoused him, and he fights for it but is not inclined to talk about it. He is not convinced but he is resolute ('to have convictions is to be a fool', Foucault said, one day). We find ourselves once again beneath the heavens ripped up between the gods mentioned by Max Weber.

'But', you may say, 'why would people wish to change things if they have no reason to do so?' Indeed, but the fact of the matter is that they are not in possession of Cartesian intellects, so they take decisions without any good reasons, although they will no doubt invent themselves some; nor do those who wish to change nothing have any reasons. What we find in Foucault is a voluntarism, for want of anything better: he does not decide that one must want what one wants; rather, he thinks that he can see that is how people behave. What he, personally, found odious was that anyone should want to make everyone believe his own truths, just because he wanted their welfare, as Foucault liked to put it. And that was exactly what Christianity, Marxism and even – alas[42] – the pagan wisdoms did.

Foucault was constantly making that point: 'It is a matter that concerns me personally when I decide on this or that in connection with prisons or psychiatric asylums, or to launch myself into various actions';[43] or he would say: 'I do not behave like a prophet. My books do not tell people what they ought to do.'[44] As we have seen, he, for his part, fought for what mattered to him 'in his subjectivity'.

That subjectivity was not purely a matter of whims. It was based on personal experience and knowledge. Oppressed Poland was one of the causes most dear to his heart,[45] because he had worked for the French Embassy in Warsaw, had seen how heavily the Soviet boot weighed on the country, and encountered 'Socialist poverty and the courage that it demands'.[46] I have already spoken of his denunciation

of the crimes of Stalin. He also felt a profound sympathy for those who were excluded, oppressed, rebellious and marginalized. Hence the impassioned friendship (no more, no less) that he told me he had felt for a while for Jean Genet.

But perhaps the best thing to do is to hand over to a close witness and colleague. Foucault sometimes felt 'an urge to strike a political blow against the inhumanity of high-security units or some other cause short-sightedly described as apolitical, which evoked nothing but indifference from revolutionary parties, religious charities, popular emotions and petitions organized by progressivist scholars'.[47] He took a militant stand on the legalization of abortion,[48] but at the time of the presidential election of 1981, he refused to associate himself with appeals in favour of Mitterand, since he did not think that an intellectual should act like a director of conscience. Conscious of the dilemma between rhetoric and philosophy and between propaganda and scepticism, he did not put forward arguments in favour of his causes. Rather, he tried to arouse indignation, then wait for a few of those who were indignant to come to him. He did not usually tackle the most momentous questions, but never ceased to press militantly for reforms. When one follows his biography month by month,[49] one finds him constantly battling against 'small' injustices of every kind, as a 'redresser of wrongs': those are the words that come closest to defining his political activity.

He took a stand against the death penalty. But he had no overall programme. In agreement with his sceptic philosophy, his only convictions were purely personal and frequently negative. For example, he would hold that *one cannot*, on principle, forbid people to rebel; *one cannot* reject the nascent future in the name of the so-called rationality of the present. It would be quite legitimate to point out to Foucault that it is not possible to draw any positive conclusions from such general principles: for instance, there is no more reason to rebel than there is not to; the future, whatever it holds, will be no more rational than the present or the past, so why

prefer the one rather than another? Out of idiosyncrasy, out of personal taste, about which it is as pointless to argue as it is about colours. He was well aware that his political opinions did not always coincide with mine, but he never preached to me or blamed me.

10

Foucault and Politics

The first principle of Foucault's idiosyncrasy – we should not view the nascent future with gloom – eventually led him to regard his *History of Sexuality* as a contribution towards a new dawn.[1] This large work had been initiated by an idea that ran against the general current in just the way that Foucault liked (sex is more of a cultural obsession than the target of repression that it is constantly said to be).[2] Then he had been carried away by his interest in the authors of Antiquity. He made himself the analyst of the Socratic 'care of the soul'[3] and the way that the subject constitutes itself or aestheticizes itself, and ended up telling himself that, all in all, people could find in this large work a contribution to the future that was dawning over and above the current moralizing 'discourse' that was in its last throes. Here, again, he may well have felt a tacit scholarly satisfaction. After all, what he was doing there was the normal task of an intellectual.[4]

Let me cite the following words that speak for themselves:

> Moving from Antiquity to Christianity, one passes from a morality that was essentially a quest for a personal ethic to a morality that was obedience to a system of rules. If I have

> taken such an interest in Antiquity, that is because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now in the process of disappearing or has already disappeared. And this absence of morality calls for – must call for an aesthetic for existence.[5]

Note the imprecision of the word 'must': does it convey an objective probability? Given that a free human subject abhors a void, this void will probably soon be filled. But is it not also the role, the duty of a philosopher (as Foucault conceived it) to contribute to filling it? Foucault was not about to preach a moral order of his own invention; rather, he was bent upon helping along a spontaneous process.

The second principle of his idiosyncrasy moved him, in 1979, to side with the Islamist uprising against the Shah of Iran. As will be remembered, before the victory of the partisans of Khomeini, this ayatollah had taken refuge in France and from here was directing the revolt. In France, or at least in Vincennes, the revolt had given rise to much enthusiasm among forward-looking minds, third-worldists and enemies of imperialism. I can testify, as can others, that Foucault did not share that naive fervour. But he was personally well disposed to any revolt, and he saw this one as a popular uprising of liberation. He wanted to find out more on this point (he was reporting on the news for *Libération*); and, furthermore, the strong personality of Khomeini fascinated him.

Foucault had a mind that was open to novelty, to the unknown,[6] and a sceptic's aversion to dogmatism. The future is unpredictable, inconceivable, and Foucault was sensitive to the solemnity of becoming. He wanted not to reduce this future to Western ideals, not to make the veiling of women an *ultima ratio* . . . so he went to see Khomeini at Neauphle-le-Chateau, where the French government had offered him hospitality. On his return, he said to me: 'You can understand my going: there is a man who, with a single word pronounced from afar, is able to launch hundreds of thousands of protesters against the tanks in the streets of Teheran.'

Then he added, 'He spoke to me of his programme of government; if he took power, the stupidity of it would make one weep' (he raised his eyes to heaven, in pity). That is what I saw and heard.

There can be no doubt that Foucault considered the Iranian revolution to be a people's liberation struggle. Similarly, the socialist regime that he had observed in Poland was, in his eyes, a foreign tyranny imposed by the Soviet tanks. 'Communism would not survive two days without the Russian occupation,' he said. But there was more to it. Foucault certainly did not share the Western-centrism and faith in democracy and human rights, not to mention sexual equality, which have become so many dogmas for many of us. Perhaps he sensed that they were all fragile conquests, which, like everything in this world, would not last forever. And, above all, he suspended judgement: by reason of his anti-dogmatism, he was neither for nor against. He was looking down on universal history from a great height.

At the same time, as a matter of principle he welcomed the novelties that history would not fail to bring about. This was the first time that an Islamist movement had erupted in the world and the effects of such a phenomenon were still more or less unknown. Foucault declared himself to be 'impressed by this attempt to open up a religious dimension in politics'. While religion was the least of his concerns, he was interested in these Iranians who 'are seeking, even at the cost of their lives, for something the possibility of which we, for our part, have forgotten ever since the Renaissance: namely, a political spirituality'. He then added, 'I can already hear French people laughing, but I know they are wrong.'

Let us try to see things clearly. In principle, with his rejection of all dogma, from a stratospheric point of view, he could not gainsay this new invention of history, but no more could he endorse it. However, he could at least adopt a position of benevolent neutrality and, without becoming a positive partisan of this political spirituality, he could be understanding about it and respectful of the solemnity of the future. The fact was that, deep down, he had been shaken

by the heroism of the Iranian crowds as they stood up to the police and the army. I think that is why he overstepped neutrality and sided with the revolutionaries, without waiting to see whether Islamism might give causes for indignation that would themselves provoke revolts. No doubt, faced with this extreme case, he was, at the same time, intellectually tempted openly to proclaim his principled distrust of our Western 'truths'. Nobody is perfect.

Foucault's stand in favour of Khomeini infuriated Iranian emigrés who were opposed to Islamism and obscurantism, and they came to the door of his apartment in Paris, intent upon beating him up. He was not impressed. However, he was more sensitive to the criticisms of his position that appeared in the French press. I have not the heart to go on about it.

Very well, let's face it: 'the solemnity of the future . . .'. You may well say, 'This proves that scepticism is false, since it is useless and cannot teach anyone what he or she should do!' But when has there ever been a philosophy or religion, of any kind, that can teach us anything, except through an illusion in which we are willing to believe, because it suits us? When has it ever been clear, except, that is, to a preacher, that the world is so well made that truth can be measured by its usefulness? It is not that the world is ill-made: it is not made at all, at least not made for us. We have to decide and choose everything for ourselves: there is no truth that comes down to us from heaven or from the transcendental.

Foucault made his choice. Later, perhaps, he might have chosen differently. But, at that moment, Foucault was envisaging that Iran might 'introduce a religious element into politics'. However, above and beyond the anecdotal level, all this raises a fundamental problem, or rather brings to light the double attitude that is logically that of any sceptic or anyone who does not fool himself. Were it not double, it would be suicidal. For what position could a sceptic adopt, faced with the possibility of a future in which minds like his or hers would no longer have any place? What would become of a genealogist who admires this solemn future, if it imposed

upon him or her a society in which religion, ideology, or simply an absence of culture, made it impossible to be a genealogist? Genealogy, scepticism and freedom of thought are all the luxuries of Westerners and Westernized peoples.

But fear not, I am not about to lay down any morality, forbid sceptic thinkers to doubt the culture that allows them to be sceptic, or urge them to cease to doubt in order to preserve the freedom to do so. I wished only to point out that certain attitudes can lead to the doubling of a personality. *Impavidum ferient ruinae* . . . To watch, fearlessly, the ruination of a mode of thought to which one subscribes and to see in that ruination confirmation of what one thinks, one has to have become a split personality and place oneself, in spirit, outside one's own time and body.

Most philosophers set out from the world as it is and rediscover it, intact and well established, when they reach their 'happy ending'. But for others, such as Nietzsche, there is no happy ending.[7] Worse still, truth and life are enemies, for truth holds it to be true, at the cost of a split personality, that its own death is possible. It is, as we have seen, sophistic to claim that sceptic *doctrine* does away with itself; on the other hand, anyone holding to that doctrine is reduced to twisting it, for, after all, life goes on. However, at least our sceptic will not use thought to confer upon his political choices the value of truth.

Depersonalizing one's inner life

But at the same time, in this doctrine that he professes to his own cost, a sceptic may seek a depersonalization, a living death. Such a depersonalization – or personality-split – involves a high-voltage spiritual exercise that is as demanding as a religion. This is an attempt (a Platonic one, to be sure, as all religions are) to become pure spirit. It is an attitude adopted in the face of our relationship with the world, a relationship that Heidegger called *Stimmung* and that is

not only active and cognitive, but also affective and existential. The land of our death oppresses and ignores us and it comes as a surprise to find the unwavering Foucault reproaching it, as did a poet before him:

> It said to me: 'I am the impassive theatre
> That cannot move the foot of any of its actors.'[8]

'By splitting myself in order to speak the truth,' Foucault wrote, 'I abolish all interiority in this outside world that is so indifferent to my life and so *neutral* that it makes no distinction between my life and my death.'[9]

This is a depersonalization sought by anyone who wants to speak the truth at all costs, so as to respond to cosmic indifference with an equal indifference.

> A just man will respond with disdain to absence,
> Responding only with a cold silence
> To the eternal silence of the Deity.[10]

Let things alone speak, and let yourself become a dumb ghost. As can be seen, Foucault was by no means a simple man; he did not have the monolithic attitude of the politicized intellectuals of the post-war period, simplified individuals, as good militants ready for the good fight must be.

Depersonalization is also attained, sometimes unknowingly, by an ethnologist who postulates an equal dignity for all cultures[11] or by a historian prepared, if necessary, to plead against the causes dearest to his heart. How did Michel Foucault come to possess this determination to tell the truth? All I know of his intellectual evolution is the following: he expressly told me that when he was nearly twenty, in about 1945, he had started off, like so many others, thinking that, on the whole, Marxism obviously made sense; so he joined the Party. He thus belonged to the generation of young French people who worked out their own personal thinking by rising above the Marxist theories of their youth. This gave them a head start. Springing from that theoretical

trampoline, they were able to rise higher than if they had started at ground level.

By the early fifties, Foucault had tacitly distanced himself from Marxism. Around 1954, in our little group of four Communist students at the École normale supérieure, in the rue d'Ulm, who clustered round him (Jean-Claude Passeron, Gérard Genette, Jean Molino and myself),[12] he spoke with bitterness of the Party. In the rather staid atmosphere of the rue d'Ulm, Foucault's company taught us a lesson. Apart from the intelligence of what he said, we had the chance to get close to someone 'unlike everyone else'. Philosophically, what was intriguing him most was the omnipresence of transcendent bases in all doctrines. I remember the closing remarks of a series of lectures he gave at the École normale: 'In reality, the ontological argument for the existence of God serves as a theological foundation for the essence of the world.' Then, around 1953, the great turning point for him was his reading of Nietzsche, understood as a challenger to the notion of truth corresponding to things: this was the ultimate and greatest transcendence of all.

Sociologically speaking, Foucault was from the start a professor who rapidly became famous thanks to the success of his books, but who was unclassifiable in university terms.[13] He had a foot in all three centres of intelligence in France, the university, journalistic circles and the world of publishing. Once he had become a well-known intellectual, the only relations that he preserved were those with journalistic and publishing circles and a few political figures.[14] In the meantime, he continued his work as an intellectual most conscientiously. When he was a young professor in a provincial university, he never missed a single one of his lectures; and his sessions at the Collège de France were the high point of the week. Staunchly amoralistic, he was nevertheless proud of his professional conscientiousness and his efforts at self-sacrifice. He could see that they testified to the power he held over himself and the rising force of his energy.

Was he a writer by vocation? He told me that, as an adolescent, he had had no plans to become a writer of books

and had envisaged other ways of life. He had no way of foreseeing that writing would one day become his reason for living. All the same, he never ceased to take an interest in current affairs and would have liked to possess real intellectual clout (which he never really did).[15] He would have liked to become an *éminence grise* in the publishing world, but without flaunting any prosaic title such as Director of a particular series. And he would even have liked to enjoy some political influence.[16] Who can blame him? He might well have been a better political adviser than certain others. Foucault was a warrior; he wanted to conquer at least a piece of the physical or moral world, whether large or small.

But whatever his secular or other ambitions, it was his inner life that became his passion and this he consigned to his books; and meanwhile his life became what his books made it. By constructing his books, he constructed himself. Whatever he had written in the past no longer counted for him, for he had to continue what was an endless task.

> Do not constantly return to what I have said in the past! Even as I say those things, I have already forgotten them. All that I have said in the past is absolutely without importance. By the time one writes something down, one has already worn it out in one's head; thought becomes anaemic and one writes it down, and that is that. What does interest me is what I might write and what I might do.[17]

One day, far from France, in Toronto, he confessed, 'I write in order to change myself and no longer think what I was thinking before.' As is well known, a creator is created by his *oeuvre* and thinks all that his *oeuvre* thinks, but there is more to it than that: salvation lies in a man dying through his writing, which depersonalizes him, and in a perpetual flight forward.

> I know that knowledge has the power to transform us and that the truth is more than just a way to decipher the world . . . but I also know that, if I know the truth, I shall be

> transformed. And possibly saved. Otherwise I shall die but, in any case, I think that, for me, it comes to the same thing.[18]

As he works, a writer depersonalizes himself in his anonymous *oeuvre*. He writes 'in order to have no face',[19] 'so as to get rid of himself', 'slowly and arduously changing for the constant sake of the truth'. Yes, that is what he wrote: 'for the sake of the truth'; 'this work of changing one's own thought and that of others seems to me to be the reason for being an intellectual'.[20] It is so as to abolish one's individuality, one's here and now and attain to a state of indifference, illimitation and independence from everything, a state that is a living death.

This is what Flaubert, a Schopenhauerian without knowing it, called objectivity.[21] When one's personality becomes 'discourse',[22] it no longer exists. To cite René Char,[23] whose poems Foucault knew by heart, 'a man is pumiced away to the point of being invisible'. Foucault led the life of a writer, but he was one of those enthusiasts who identify not so much with their *oeuvre* as with the act of writing or of painting (as he grew older, he sometimes produced sketches of Sartre, of Picasso, even of Proust).

> That is why . . . I have worked like a sick man all my life. I am totally unconcerned about the university status of what I do, because my problem is my own transformation . . . This transformation of oneself through one's own knowledge comes, I think, close to the aesthetic experience. Why would a painter work if he were not transformed by his painting?[24]

Foucault the philosopher or historian here likens his case to that of an artist, a painter. His self-observation had shown him that, through his work, he had reached a point where, even if unequal in dignity, intellectual activities of the most prosaic and humble nature were indistinguishable from literary or artistic creations. For Foucault, this was a kind of religion. He had converted to it while a student at the École

normale, unpredictably while reading works of Maurice Blanchot. 'At that time, I admired Blanchot more than anyone', he told me, 'and I wanted to do as he did.' This is a kind of religion that is frequently found among those who cultivate the arts and letters (Flaubert and Mallarmé, to cite but two great ancestors), but, apart from a few philosophers, it is more rare among scholars.

Any activity of the mind that is an end in itself (even if it can later have certain applications, for example, influencing public opinion) allows one to accede both to an impersonality in which the self of the researcher or writer disappears, and to the birth of a self without qualities, without attributes, faceless, a self that is neither immortal nor eternal (at such times, one hardly thinks at all of oneself), but is a stranger to the times, situated beyond time. Whenever one is absorbed in one's work, one forgets real death: it is not that one is eternal and certainly one is not unforgettable or immortal; but one is depersonalized, reified into an anonymous text. It is as if the artist or researcher were already dead, and that is what Foucault meant when he wrote, 'I shall be transformed, saved, or perhaps dead.' Yes, dead, because for this Nietzschean, there was no possible salvation; the only choice was between nothingness and the chaos in which one is alive. To cease to change, to wish to escape from a reality both external and internal that is definitely chaotic, is to live as if dead.

11

Portrait of a Samurai

This so-called leftist was neither a Freudian nor a Marxist; not a sociologist, not a progressivist, not a third-worldist, not a Heideggerian. He read neither Bourdieu nor *Le Figaro* and was a Nietzschean neither 'on the left' (as some were), nor on the right. He was the untimely (to use a Nietzschean term) outsider of his epoch. He was nonconformist, and that was enough to classify him as being on the left. And yet, for his part, when he was a professor at Vincennes, in the aftermath to 1968, deep down he regarded Maoists and leftist groups as sympathetic phenomena, or even useful ones, since they were agitated, but he also considered them to be of subordinate importance. As for them, they found him unpredictable. But he was cunning. Preferring to be associated with the left, he was careful not to dissipate the nuanced ambiguity that separated his untimeliness from the leftism of his admirers. For it was only among the leftist militants and with *Libération* that he could find comrades to support him in his personal battles.

I hasten to add that, on the other hand, he was very wholehearted, not a man to make concessions to any opinion in the interests of his literary career. Of course, every writer manages the interests of his career more or less transparently, more or less adroitly, and more or less tenaciously. Foucault

did not neglect those interests and dealt with them diplomatically, but his truths were not negotiable. He lived first and foremost for his books and his ideas. From time to time, he complained to me that he was disappointed not to be able to publish his lectures sufficiently rapidly. Those who, after his death, so meticulously published his *Cours* (*Lecture Courses*) and his *Dits et Ecrits* (*Sayings and Writings*) made all his posthumous dreams come true.

On the right, Foucault was always suspected of being a public enemy, and with reason. For, far from deploring the modern world with all its bread and circuses and its virtual realities, he simply, without resorting to satire, exposed the full scope of the fabled world. How could I not approve of this, since the peaceful job of a historian is exactly that? It is that lucidity, unaffected by temporality, that distinguishes untimely spirits such as Foucault from the anti-moderns who did not approve of him (in my view, Jean Baudrillard was an anti-modern).

To the delight of historians, Foucault was prepared to dig deep to discover radical differences on all sides and in all epochs. But, at the same time, in every case he showed that any so-called roots were rooted in nothing. Everyone – or almost everyone – more or less suspects this, but generally we forget about it so as to live in peace, or we only remember it when seated at our work-desks. Foucault, however, never forgot it and, while looking down on the world from a great height, he also saw it as a potential battlefield now that this world, both ancient and modern, had – in his eyes – forfeited all legitimacy. He worked hard and did not live in a permanent state of indignation or feverish militancy; but he kept himself informed and, from time to time, struck out against some intolerable abuse.

Among the innovations that Giscard d'Estaing introduced at the beginning of his term of office was a plan to invite a handful of great minds, such as Mme de Romilly, to lunch with him at the Elysée Palace. Foucault replied that he would attend on condition that he could question the President about the trial of the so-called 'red pullover', in which a man

found guilty but who may not have been was sentenced to death and guillotined, after Giscard had refused to pardon him. Foucault was not at the Elysée lunch.

If one seeks to identify a particular type of human being, one might spot in Foucault a 'sceptic renouncement of the possibility of making sense of the world', to borrow the words of Max Weber who, in a rather exaggerated way, regarded this as an attitude that was 'common to all intellectual levels in every age'.[1] It is impossible to tell what Homer, Euripides, Shakespeare, Chekhov or Max Weber himself thought of their own heroes.[2] It was better to be a friend of Foucault than an enemy, for he could be harsh when faced with people who wanted to sound off at him off the top of their heads or who reckoned that their own rigorous thinking should have brought them more celebrity than he enjoyed. Meeting, as a friend, with Foucault, one sensed an attentive attitude that was never judgemental. In his books, he exposed the most bizarre doctrines without ever passing judgement on them. With the admiring sympathy that a naturalist feels for the inventiveness of Nature, he gathered in the whole of human diversity, with all its eccentricities, follies, nonsenses, excesses and impulses of megalomania. He never lamented over them, never mocked them.

One day, I surprised him on the telephone, engaged in one of his incessant exchanges with the *Libération* newspaper. He had just made the acquaintance of a powerful woman detested by the leftists, Marie-France Garaud, an Elysée adviser. 'No, no,' he was protesting to his surprised interlocutor. 'She has the personality not so much of a politician but of a literary figure!' When he had hung up, he turned to me and, no doubt dreaming of his childhood, he said, 'Too bad. Tomorrow I am lecturing at the Collège. Had that not been so, just imagine, I could have spent the afternoon on Marie-France Garaud's lap!' If I am not very much mistaken, that really does reflect a strong streak of humanism.

Such was the tacit rule that governed the salon life that he had instituted in his impeccably run apartment in the rue

de Vaugirard. One did not gossip in those soirées punctuated by his loud bursts of humorous laughter, where poor Hervé Guibert, already a well-recognized writer, who had no idea that an early death awaited him, was extremely charming and never acidly sarcastic. Foucault, who discouraged groupies and fans, was friendly, loyal and generous towards those who were not jealous of him and treated him on an equal footing, as a friend. I should add that the steel of his ego concealed none of those bubbles of petty vanity that are sometimes to be found in great figures, bubbles that make those who are themselves vain grind their teeth, while leaving those who are not totally indifferent. In that egalitarian salon, well organized but not at all conventional, one was left in peace to enjoy being oneself. I was welcome there, whoever the other guests were, as Foucault had bestowed upon me the title of 'honorary homosexual', not without a gentle reproach: 'A man like you, open and knowledgeable, yet who prefers women!'

But, one morning, I received proof of his own open-mindedness. During the period when I was teaching at the Collège de France, Foucault would generously invite me to dinner and offer me hospitality in the studio attached to his apartment. Together, we revived a mini-version of our friendship of the old world of the rue d'Ulm (the École normale supérieure), and called each other by our then nicknames: Foucault was 'Fouks', the Fox. At this point, I will mention a detail the relevance of which will soon become apparent. Readers may know of the moving but mad letter that Nietzsche, in the last years of his insanity, wrote to Cosima von Bülow, who had become Cosima Wagner: 'Ariadne, I love you!' he wrote, and signed himself as Dionysus, for he believed himself to be a reincarnation of that god.[3] Cosima von Bülow, the last and greatest love of Nietzsche!

One morning, at breakfast time, I was awakened by sounds coming from the next room, a rattling of little spoons and the cheerful sound of two voices, Foucault's and the fresh voice of a woman. Amazed and embarrassed, I knocked on the door, coughed, and entered to behold a couple just

getting out of bed: Foucault and a beautiful young woman with an intelligent face. Both were dressed in sumptuous kimonos (or rather, yukatas) that Foucault had brought back from Tokyo, as a pair. They invited me to sit down and we chatted in a friendly way for a while. Then the unknown lady, who spoke impeccable French, with no trace of a foreign accent, took her leave. Hardly had the front door closed than Foucault, as proud as a peacock in his transgression, turned to me and said, 'We spent the night together; I kissed her on the mouth!' He then told me that they had even considered marrying, but only on condition that Foucault took the name of his wife. 'I would have called myself Michel von Bülow!' However, German law would not allow it. It is not hard to imagine how regretful Foucault the Nietzschean must have been.

Others have spoken, better than I can, about the other side of this elegant great gentleman, as dry as a flint, whose courage had been demonstrated several times over. (One day, on a beach in Tunisia, he had rushed into a burning café to save its owner, risking being blown up by an exploding gas bottle.) My late lamented friend, Georges Ville, an official in the *Deuxième Bureau*, used to say that, ordinarily, intellectuals are not afraid of danger; what they fear are rows. (During his time at the École normale, Foucault was, for a while, Ville's platonic lover and once said to me, 'With his melancholic humour, what he must have suffered, being so beautiful!') Foucault, though, was not afraid of rows and insisted that courage is always physical: courage means a courageous body – a remark that prompts one to name things more carefully. One does not exploit the labour of a worker: what one exploits is his body; one does not train civilians to accept military discipline: what one trains are their bodies, so that they themselves can control them; what the prison system incarcerates are bodies.

This friend of the damned had all the sensitivity of a man of the ancient world flayed alive. He was a victim of sexual prejudice who, in his pride, had decided to be himself in the face of his oppressors. He was ashamed of having been

victimized, as an adolescent, by the people around him. He told me so around 1954, choking on the words.

In those far-off days, in the École normale, which was attended by 300 young men, homosexuality was invisible and totally forbidden. Only Foucault, as he took his leave, allowed the truth to show to a handful of disciples and admirers.[4] He was then a young man, living with aggressive bitterness with his difference and his scorn of both others and himself. He had internalized his exclusion to such a degree that, one day in 1954, he spoke to me sourly of 'the great hysterical comedy' that he then considered homosexuality to represent. His unease sometimes erupted in bouts of vengeful and scornful scoffing at the spectacle of his unconcerned oppressors, the 'heteros', who were not aware that they were oppressing him. Even the Communist Party was by no means backward in practising exclusion, and a certain internal scandal within our own cell around 1954 revealed to us what suffering such prejudice caused for some of our comrades.

At the risk of being too anecdotal, here is a little memory that illustrates the extent of the taboo in 1954. When Foucault learned that our little group of four *Normaliens* had behaved pretty well at the time of the drama to which I have just alluded, he decided, not exactly to 'come out', but at least to force us to open our eyes. Cocteau, who was at that time a Communist 'fellow traveller', had just been elected to the Académie française and we were commenting ironically on the fulsome article that the *Humanité* newspaper had produced for the occasion. Passing on without a break from the newspaper to Cocteau himself, Foucault suddenly exclaimed, '*She* is completely mad (*folle*). She was asked, "Where will you be spending your holidays this summer, sir?" and *she* replied coquettishly, "I shan't be leaving Paris; I have to have a number of fittings."' A shiver ran down my spine, for it was the first time that I had actually heard this 'she' that was a feminine form in the secret language of Hell and that made it impossible to ignore that a number of the damned were present among us. The French word *folle* was

not just a feminine form of *fou*, but a technical term used by this secret society in which Foucault no longer concealed his status as an initiate, the scandal-mongering society described in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*).

When I met up with Foucault again, twenty years later at the Collège de France, he no longer sneered or relayed tittle-tattle. There was nothing at all hysterical about him. He had become 'a decent *pédé* (pederast) with no problems', as he himself put it. He told me that, in his youth, he had started off with a period of indiscriminate 'trawling', as was then the fashion. 'How many women have you slept with in your life?' he asked me, then went on, 'As for myself, when I began, I slept with two hundred men in the very first year.' A witness assures me that the tally is somewhat exaggerated, as are those to be found in the Old Testament. There followed a passionate and painful liaison[5] that meant a great deal to him; then came a lasting love, decades of living companionably with Daniel Defert, to whom he was bound by a deep and mutual affection.

However, he also told me, his great passion during his years at secondary school had nothing to do with his nascent homosexuality; it involved downing as many drugs as he could filch from his father, who was a doctor, in order to find out how much they altered one's thinking and also to discover that different kinds of thinking are possible. 'Mama, what do fishes think?' he asked his mother one day, faced with a fishbowl in which goldfish were swimming.[6] The thinking of a fish, medical drugs, hard drugs, madness . . . they all showed that our normal way of thinking was not the only one possible. There are many ways of sparking off a philosophical vocation.

As for homosexuality and Foucault's sufferings, they clearly 'influenced' or maybe even produced in him a particular sensitivity that informed his research and determined some of its objects. As Didier Eribon has pointed out to me, in his own life he had at an early age discovered that psychiatry and psychoanalysis are also technologies of power.

Later, he was also to discover that the modern 'discourse' on 'sex' presented homosexuality as a crucial component of an individual's identity, an identity that the individual would have to accept and had to recognize, since science had spoken and its knowledge exerted power over the 'true' identity of all individuals. Much of his intellectual energy was consequently deployed in battling against the normativity imposed by knowledge about 'sex' and in resisting the effects of the power that this 'discourse' of truth fostered.

Foucault had retained his taste for drugs, opium and LSD, but only indulged it in controlled episodes at intervals of several months, since his delight in writing and working and the pleasures that he derived from teaching were enough to prevent any excesses. Once he had completed the course of lectures that he gave each year in Berkeley (he was happy in the United States and loved the country), he would treat himself to an LSD trip (which on one occasion almost proved disastrous for him) and a jaunt to some gay sauna in San Francisco's homosexual ghetto, where his behaviour was less sadistic than some have assumed. It was from this that he died. In his study in the Collège de France, one wall displayed a poster advertising the delights of that sauna. Although Foucault was already ill, he never took it down.

He was not afraid of death, as he told his friends when the conversation turned to suicide[7] (as a good samurai, he carried two swords, the shorter of which was used for suicide) and subsequent facts proved that this was no idle boast. He devoted the very last months of his life to writing and rewriting his two books on love in the ancient world, as he had promised himself that he would. Sometimes he would get me to check one of his translations and he would complain of a persistent cough and a constant light fever. Out of courtesy, he asked me to get advice from my wife, who is a doctor but was unable to help. 'Your doctors will no doubt think that you have got AIDS,' I joked (mutual teasing about each other's amorous tastes was one of the rituals of our friendship). 'That is precisely what they think,' he smiled, 'as I could tell from the questions that they asked me.' Readers

now will find it hard to believe that, in February 1984, a fever and a cough aroused no suspicions. AIDS was at that time a scourge so distant and so unknown that it was considered something of a myth or perhaps a figment of the imagination.[8] 'Honestly,' I asked, purely out of curiosity, 'does AIDS really exist or is it just a cautionary tale?' 'Well, listen,' he replied after a moment's thought, 'I have studied the question and have read quite a bit about it: yes, it does exist and it is not a legend. American doctors have studied it closely.' Then, briefly, in one or two sentences, he gave me some technical details. 'After all,' I said to myself, 'he is a historian of medicine.' Snippets from America on 'the cancer of homosexuals' were appearing in the newspapers, in which the reality of this scourge was still questioned.

Looking back, his cool response to my crass question takes my breath away. He himself must have seen the question coming and meditated on his reply to me, counting on me then to remember it.[9] From then on, I felt a suppressed anxiety that found expression in grating pleasantries about Foucault's health and eventually surfaced in a hallucination[10] on the very day of his death, Monday 25 June 1984, just a few hours before a phone call from Tokyo, from Maurice Pinguet, a Japanese scholar, who told me the news, which had just been announced on Tokyo radio.

Such, then, was the life and death of this righter of wrongs, this reformer always on the attack, neither a Utopian nor a nihilist, neither a conservative nor a revolutionary. Let me venture a few words on his good sense. His philosophy of understanding was the polar opposite of Reason in history. And I should mention the acuity of his eye, which pitilessly, through the fog of essences, perceived the arbitrary nature of singularities. This elegant figure, steeped in sangfroid and clarity, was courageous, inflexible, cutting rather than ironical (since irony tends to strike a falsetto note). He was fully aware of the hostility and jealousy that he provoked around him; he was a lucid psychologist of mediocrity.

He deployed the full force of his ego without restraint but, by the same token, refused to indulge in psychological

falsity towards himself. He sinned courageously (*pecca fortiter*, as Luther used to say) and forthrightly acknowledged it to himself. When he behaved badly,[11] he did not disguise the fact (morality mattered to him; it was important to him not to be a shit in his own eyes). To clear his conscience, he would feel the need to confess to a trusted friend (whom he knew, or presumed, to be up to date with all the gossip and tittle-tattle rife within the circle in which we moved).

At the same time, though, he was sensitive, susceptible to amorous passion, but not without an inner life with pettinesses and phobias of its own, like anyone else. His cunning moves and his generosity, too, testified to affectionate relationships of devotion and friendships both solid and passionate. In conversation, he spoke rapidly and made his presence felt, without seeking to dominate. He was courteous and outward-going with everyone, never pontificated and was never condescending. Those (men and women alike) who worked for him said that he addressed them as equals and kindly. 'I get along fine with my secretary,' he told me. 'When in the car together, watching the passers-by, we both fancy the same men.' His constant egalitarianism went without saying, for Foucault was always true to himself, modelled from within, beyond all the conventional attitudes that characterize various circles, so that he would sometimes bewilder people that he talked to, leaving them wondering who they were dealing with.

Foucault seldom listened to music, but loved painting (his liking for Manet is well known) and he had very definite tastes in literature. Around 1955, there were, according to him, two literary camps in France, one of which, discounted by many, included Brecht, Sartre and Saint-Jean Perse, while the other, generally considered the only good one, was composed of critics and writers such as Beckett, Blanchot, Bataille and Char. Foucault's literary appreciation was acute. I can still see him leaping up from his desk, one morning, like a Jack-in-the-Box, with his eyes wide and an open book in his hand: 'Hey, Veyne, don't you find that literature has things

superior to all the rest? For me, the tirade of the blinded Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus, the King* . . .', words failed him.

To return to his own books, there is one theme that they constantly repeat: 'In the name of what principle could you or I recommend a programme of action? You must not allow yourselves to be impressed by the present, which is already in the past by the time you discern what it might be; rather, simply know what you want and what you will not tolerate.' I often think of him and there comes into my mind, like a kind of prayer, four lines written by William Carlos Williams about the morning star (which is the same as the evening star, as no modern logician, since Frege, can fail to know):

> It's a strange courage
> You give me, ancient star:
> Shine alone in the sunrise
> Toward which you lend no part.[12]

Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France attracted huge crowds, just as those of Bergson used to. The hall would be full. People were seated, standing, even lying down, and when all the seats were taken, they sat on the aisle steps. Well-known figures would be present: theatre people, one of Stalin's former secretaries. Tape-recorders would be clicking throughout the lecture (there was a discreet black-market trade in cassettes of his lectures). Pierre Nora and I would be there, sitting quietly side by side and reflecting on what we heard.

Right at the front, stretched out on the floor at the foot of the lectern, a very handsome, slender, long-limbed young actor lifted his face towards the professor, his head elegantly supported on one hand. This allegorical figure that at a stroke separated the public from the orator testified to the crowded nature of the hall. His ostentatious presence there indicated his approval of the orator's thoughts and the languid pose, which separated the two of them from the conventions of the crowd and provided the finishing touch

to the legend, was justified because 'they were both on the right side'.[13]

Foucault took no notice and left well alone. However, with a few elegant words, he refused to be photographed.

The rue du Fouarre, in Paris, is very close to the Collège de France. And Dante (who was the most complete human monad who ever existed and who took a passionate interest in everything) placed in his *Paradise* Siger de Brabant, who was condemned in 1277 by the Bishop of Paris for having contrasted the truths of philosophy to the revelations of Faith. This is what Dante wrote of him:[14]

> The eternal glory of Siger is that, in the lectures that he gave in the rue du Fouarre, he aroused hatred by reasoning truthfully.

My thanks go to Didier Eribon, who suggested that I should write this little book, and also to Daniel Defert, for all his support (who, however, is not responsible for the mistakes that I must have made). As readers will have realized, Jean-Marie Schaeffer has been my philosophical mentor. At the Michel Albin publishing house, Hélène Monsacré managed finally to bring about the birth of this book that had been gestating for twenty years. She has been the most skilful of advisers as well as the most competent of editors.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 2: 'Foucault is the great skeptic of our times. He is skeptical about dogmatic unities and philosophical anthropologies. He is the philosopher of dispersion and singularity.'
2 *Dits et Ecrits*, ed. Defert and Ewald (Gallimard, 1994, 4 vols), III, p. 135 (from here onward, this work will be cited as *DE*).
3 Foucault declared that Heidegger had been important for him and, in *DE*, IV, p. 703, writes of reading his works. However, in my own humble opinion, he had read little more than Heidegger's *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* and the big book on Nietzsche, which was indeed important for him as its paradoxical effect was to make him a Nietzschean, not a Heideggerian.
4 Montaigne, *Essays* II, 12, *The Apology of Raymond Sebond*, translated by M. A. Screech (Penguin Books, 1987).

CHAPTER 1 IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY, EVERYTHING IS SINGULAR: 'DISCOURSE'

1 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979).

2 *DE*, IV, p. 726: 'I have been interpreted as saying that madness did not exist, whereas the problem is quite the reverse' (translated from the French, here and throughout, by Janet Lloyd). See also *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, translated by Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3.

3 *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michael Aenellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 118: 'One can certainly say that "madness does not exist", but this does not mean it is nothing.'

4 Here is an immediate example. M. I. Finley stated that in Homer, as throughout Antiquity, 'women were held to be naturally inferior and therefore limited their function to the production of offspring and the performance of household duties' (*The World of Odysseus*, Pelican Books – Chatto & Windus, 1956, p. 149). Hélène Monsacré, in a more precise analysis, wrote: 'The profound analysis of women lay in the impossibility of truly integrating a part of masculinity' (*Les Larmes d'Achille: le héros, la femme et la souffrance dans la poésie d'Homère*, Albin Michel, 1984, p. 200, translated here by Janet Lloyd).

5 As Daniel Defert observes in 'La violence entre pouvoirs et interprétations chez Foucault', in *De la violence, Séminaire de Françoise Héritier* (Odile Jacob, 2005), vol. I, p. 105. Foucault seldom did make the major themes of his philosophy explicit.

6 *DE*, IV, p. 116.

7 I am simplifying the more detailed analysis produced by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 113–14.

8 See *DE*, IV, p. 635: 'Bring analysis to bear upon *practices*, approach a study from the angle of what *people did*.'

9 *DE*, I, p. 56.

10 Foucault's books, which certainly are difficult, have disconcerted various historians with a more traditional background who, notwithstanding, ventured to criticize them (I am thinking of, for example, the bursts of hilarity aimed, most unsuitably, at his interpretation of the *Oneirocritica* by Artemidorus of Daldis).

11 See *DE*, III, pp. 311–12; Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality* (Harvard University Press, 2001).
12 By using the word *dispositif* (here translated as 'set-up'), Foucault was able to avoid the word 'structure' and so to avoid confusion with the ideas of structuralism which was then very trendy as well as being very confused.
13 *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Tavistock Publications, 1974), p. 119.
14 *DE*, II, p. 136.
15 For instance, in my view, L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot, *De la justification* (Gallimard, 1991), and P. Rosanvallon. The latter, describing his method, noted in 2001 that he apprehended 'ideas' by writing their history as '*active* representations that mark out the boundary between the field of what is possible and the field of what is thinkable', so as to 'get beyond the ordinarily accepted separation between the order of facts and that of representations'. He then added that the history of politics 'cannot be limited to analyses and commentaries on major works'. Foucault too held that conviction. In *Généalogie des Barbares* (Odile Jacob, 2007), R.-P. Droit describes the constantly shifting displacements of the 'historical frontier' constituted by 'discourse' separating Barbarians from those who are not Barbarians. Of course, I am not suggesting that these authors all claim Foucault as their inspiration; but the subtle precision of their analyses, which do not have recourse to universals and do bite deeply into reality, does put one in mind of Foucault's way of writing.
16 The relation of one human mind to another, living or dead, is a compound of initiative and receptiveness (which that mind translates to itself through words or acts or even through an 'objective mind', custom, institution, doctrine or practice, together with the meaning of those practices). This relation of comprehension, whether correct or erroneous, is a major factor of the human condition, irreducible to anything prior. It is this factor that makes historical understanding possible. However, one only 'understands' (or, of course, thinks one understands) natural phenomena, particularly extraordinary ones, by believing that they are produced by Minds or are themselves Minds.
17 Yes, each person can interpret a text as it suits his or her personal whim, but the text remains itself, which is not its

interpretation. Against the 'linguistic turn' and Gadamer, see R. Chartier, *Au bord de la falaise, l'histoire entre certitude et inquiétude* (Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 87–125; R. Koselleck, *Zeitschichten, Studien zur Historik* (Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 99–118; E. Flaig, 'Kinderkrankheiten der neuen Kulturgeschichte', in *Rechtshistorisches Journal*, 18 (1999): 458–76.

18 *DE*, IV, p. 580. See I, p. 571: 'Marx does not interpret the history of relations of production; he interprets a relation already presented as an interpretation, since it is presented as natural.'

19 *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, translated by Graham Burchell (2008), p. 3.

20 Ibid., p. 3, and n.4. Here, again, Foucault is probably correcting what I had represented him as saying in 1978. See also *DE*, IV, p. 634: 'to reject a universal notion of *madness*, *delinquency* or *sexuality* does not mean that whatever those notions refer to is nothing' or that they are simply self-interested and deceptive ideologies.

21 *The Birth of Biopolitics*, pp. 2–3.

22 *DE*, I, p. 665.

23 Ibid., pp. 707–8.

24 *DE*, II, pp. 9–10.

25 R.-P. Droit, *Michel Foucault, entretiens* (Odile Jacob, 2004), p. 34.

26 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 110.

27 *Le Souci de soi* (Gallimard, 1984), p. 56. Besides, individualism can be taken to mean all manner of things: 1. the attention that an individual pays to his own person, as exemplifying the human condition; 2. an individual's ontological priority or even ethical primacy over the collectivity or the state; 3. a kind of nonconformism or disdain for common norms; 4. realizing one's personal potential as a human masterpiece, even if this conflicts with morality; 5. a determination to realize one's own ambitions, rather than remaining in one's allotted rank; 6. feeling different from other people and disdaining social models; 7. desiring to enjoy a zone of private liberties in opposition to the authorities (as in the eighteenth century, according to Charles Taylor); 8. publicly affirming one's choice of oneself above all else; 9. having a personal relationship, not mediated by any authorities or group, with an ethical or religious absolute (as at the time of the Reforma-

tion, again according to Charles Taylor); 10. enriching one's own personality by seeking new experiences and transforming them into self-knowledge.

28 The vague word 'identity' also covers multiple realities. To be a Muslim is to belong to a community of believers, a sacred cause, which is multi-ethnic and politically divided, frequently conflictual; nevertheless, against the infidels, Believers of every nationality should support one another. A sense of identity can take many different forms. One may call oneself a Muslim for personal reasons, or as a member of a community of Believers, or as an Arab, a Moor, an Iranian, etc., or as a Moroccan national, or as a faithful subject of the Sultan of Morocco. A sense of identity can thus be expressed sometimes in religious terms, sometimes in national ones, as a result of which Islam may be seen as an 'ideological cover' for politics; and religions are likely to be accused of being all too often at the origin of belligerent fanaticism. In reality, when conflict is embodied by a religious or heretical faction, religion is neither its origin nor an ideological cover for it; rather, it constitutes a solemn expression of the conflict, just as, in the West, it may express a politico-social theory. There is an age of religions and one of doctrines. Nietzsche used to say that future wars would be philosophical.

29 Max Weber's *Entzeuberung* is not the 'disenchantment' of a world without God or gods; rather, it is a 'demagification' of the technological sphere. Magic seeks to *avoid* (fanciful) dangers or to legitimate decisions (ordeals, the Judgement of God). It stands in opposition to technological rationality, which seeks for practical results and also for a certain juridical rationality. Weber speaks of it *à propos* China, where the considerable importance of magic, geomancy, astrology and so forth had the effect of blocking technological thought. 'Disenchantment' is not at all to do with religiosity or knowing whether a godless world is sad or disenchanted, or whether the twenty-first century will be religious.

30 Against the over-general idea of rationalization, see *DE*, IV, p. 236: 'I do not think one can speak of *rationalization* in itself without, on the one hand, presupposing reason to have an absolute value and, on the other, risking placing more or less anything under the rubric "rationalizations".'

31 *DE*, IV, p. 634.

32 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 148, 156, 201; *DE*, I, p. 676.
33 As young Communists with much yet to learn, we were surprised, in 1954, to learn that big business was divided on the project of a European Defence Community (EDC).
34 *DE*, IV, p. 580.
35 *The Order of Things* (Tavistock Publications, 1970), p. 370: what made history as written in the nineteenth century singular was not a quest for the laws of coming-to-be but, on the contrary, a 'concern to historicize everything'.
36 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, ed. Coli-Montinari, Band II, 38 [14]: 'We no longer believe in eternal concepts or eternal forms, and for us philosophy is simply the widest extension of the notion of history.' The etymology and history of language has taught us to regard all concepts as 'having come to be' . . . It took us a very long time to recognize the multiplicity of distinct qualities in a single object (consider our earlier example: the distinction between pleasures, flesh, sex and gender).

CHAPTER 2 THERE IS NO 'A PRIORI' THAT IS NOT HISTORICAL

1 *DE*, III, pp. 257–8.
2 *DE*, IV, pp. 20–35.
3 *DE*, I, p. 583.
4 Ibid., p. 607.
5 Ibid., p. 824.
6 I have tried to develop this fleeting observation of Foucault's in *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien* (Albin Michel, 2007), pp. 59–60, n.1, and Append., pp. 317–18 (English translation forthcoming).
7 *DE*, IV, pp. 15, 33 and 651, reproduced from *L'Impossible prison. Recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIXe siècle réunies par Michelle Perrot* (Seuil, 1980), pp. 34 and 55.
8 As Foucault told Roger-Pol Droit, *Michel Foucault, entretiens* (Odile Jacob, 2004), p. 82. Art and literature are 'intransitive': 'we have been able to rid ourselves of the idea that literature is always transitive, an expression of totalities'. The use of the word 'intransitive', with this unusual meaning is, as often happens in Foucault's work, an implied citation from René

Char, *Partage formel*, LIV. A poet is like an intransitive verb, which, as the grammarians tell us, has no object to complete it: he creates art for art's sake.

9 See *DE*, IV, p. 651.

10 A. Farge and M. Foucault, *Le Désordre des familles: lettres de cachet de la Bastille* (Gallimard, 1982).

11 See *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 163–4.

12 *DE*, IV, p. 543.

13 Here is a simple way of making a comparison: when he began working on love in the ancient world, Foucault attended a talk that I gave on this subject at a seminar organized by Georges Duby. The text is published in my *Société romaine* (Seuil, 1991), pp. 88–130. Anyone can see what Foucault owed to me and, above all, what he did not owe to me at all.

14 *DE*, IV, p. 23.

15 *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 171.

16 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 44, and see p. 119.

17 *The Birth of the Clinic*, pp. 168 and 170.

18 In the primary sense of this adjective *incontournable*, which Foucault made fashionable but which was fashionably misconstrued to mean whatever was 'unmissable', whatever one absolutely *had* to see or read if one wished to be up to date. As Foucault used this adjective, what it meant, on the contrary, was something that blocked the view of other things and made it impossible to strike out in a different direction: 'discourse' is 'impossible to get around', for it *forces* us to live in our own time. That misconstruction shows just how blind common sense can be.

19 For example, Christianity or Islam, religious creations which, as we well know, were hugely successful, and their respective 'discourses' (which I shall not attempt to spell out) which are certainly very different from those of Graeco-Roman paganism, initiation or Mystery religions and the pre-Islamic cults of Arabia.

20 *DE*, IV, p. 632.

21 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 127–9 and 206–7.

22 On E. Said and the condemnation of Orientalism by minds that had clearly had no idea of the existence of curiosity that was disinterested and gratuitous, such as that demonstrated even as early as Herodotus, see B. Lewis, *Islam in the West* (Oxford University Press, 1993), Part IV, Section 3.

23 *DE*, III, p. 160.
24 *DE*, IV, p. 828.
25 On the possible formation of 'ideological covers' from 'discourses', see Foucault, *'Il faut défendre la société'. Cours au Collège de France* (Hautes Etudes-Gallimard-Seuil, 1997), pp. 29–30.
26 For a critique of the notion of ideology, I refer readers to P. Veyne, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, op. cit., pp. 225–48.
27 As Ulrich J. Schneider points out in *Michel Foucault* (Darmstadt, 2004), p. 145.
28 This reflects a quotation from Nietzsche. See *DE*, II, p. 1258: 'We are told by great universal intellectuals that we are *in need* [my italics] of a world vision.'
29 Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Adieu à l'esthétique* (Collège international de philosophie, PUF, 2000), p. 4.
30 *DE*, III, p. 299.
31 *DE*, III, p. 583.
32 For an example, see *'Il faut défendre la société'*, pp. 28–30.
33 *DE*, III, pp. 636–42.
34 *DE*, III, p. 158.
35 See *DE*, III, pp. 257–8. Truth is, indeed, one of the components of a set-up. But not the truth of the concepts that different ages may have constructed of sex, power, law or anything else (on this point a sceptic, as we know, holds that not one of those general ideas is any more true than another, so they are all equally invalid). Rather, it is a matter of the concept of truth that each epoch has constructed in one particular domain or another. For example, in the Old Testament, the gods of foreign peoples are 'lying gods', but who is lying here? Not those gods themselves, for they do not exist (or, to be more precise, 'are nothing'); nor those who worship them. The fact is simply that, when one tried to define truth, one imagined it to be the opposite of lies. I think that one may, likewise, believe in certain things without actually telling oneself: 'this is true', so it does not occur to one to see the truths of others as lies.
36 See the comments of one of Foucault's great friends, Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1982), pp. 306–17.
37 *DE*, II, p. 541.

38 *DE*, II, pp. 538–53.

39 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 164. On the causal relations between social facts and mental facts, see *DE*, II, p. 161 (a critique of Marxist causality as an 'expression': Darwinism is said to 'express' the interests of the bourgeoisie).

40 *L'Ordre du discours* (Gallimard, 1971), p. 60. A statement is not the product of any transcendental subject who inspires it. Rather, it imposes itself on a knowing subject in the way that brute facts do and its bizarre shape, as absurd as forms shaped by chance, is clearly not the fruit of any non-temporal *Ego* or any Heideggerian freedom to behold the truth revealing itself; see 'repeatable materiality' in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 102.

41 An analysis of a 'discourse', for example, that of melancholy, is not a lexical study of the meanings of the word 'melancholy' (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 47–8). Why choose the word 'discourse'? There are several explanations. One is heuristic: Foucault began by working above all on texts (medical treatises relating to madness). At first he was not sure where he was going; initially, he must have thought that his problem was a linguistic one and so he wanted to stick as closely as possible to the facts, which were written ones. Furthermore, he did not want to risk being led back to any of the great problems sacred to philosophy – not because he was playing hard to get, but because his deep positivism made him wary of anything that might seem metaphysical. He therefore used a vocabulary of his own rather than the technical terms of philosophy. Another explanation is that, in order to be understood and accepted, he wished to involve himself in the problem of the moment, which was of a linguistic nature (as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, a book written too hurriedly, demonstrates). Many readers were misled by this. Another misleading title, *Les mots et les choses* (translated into English as *The Order of Things*), added to the confusion: it was thought that Foucault's problem was the relations of words to their referents. In the end, Foucault had to try to clear up the confusion. This he attempted to do in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 48 and in *DE*, I, p. 776. He explained that, in the seventeenth century, naturalists produced many descriptions of plants and animals. Traditionally, 'one writes the history of those descriptions in one of two ways. Either one

begins with things and says: animals, being as they are, and plants, being as we see them, how did the people of the seventeenth century see and describe them? What did they observe and what did they omit? What did they see and what did they not see? Alternatively, one reverses the analysis: one notes what words and concepts science had at its disposition at that time and, on the basis of this, one sees what grid was placed on plants and animals as a whole.'

What Foucault noticed was that, without realizing it, naturalists were thinking via a 'discourse' composed neither of real objects nor the semantic field with all its concepts. Rather, this was 'discourse' that was, so to speak, situated beyond and correlatively controlled the formation of objects, on the one hand, and concepts, on the other. 'Discourse' is a third element, a *tertium quid* which, unnoticed by those involved, explains 'how it is that a particular thing is either seen or overlooked, how it is that it is envisaged in a particular aspect and analysed at a particular level, and how it is that a particular word is employed with a particular meaning'.

42 *DE*, I, p. 548, see p. 499; II, pp. 282–4. See, for example, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1976), p. 471.

43 Foucault ironically declared that such lofty speculations were beyond him: 'The humble material that I handle does not allow such royal treatment'; it would be hard to discover the history of any historical formation without taking into account, for example, the effects of power and even, in many cases, those of the 'discourse' of the central power at the time (*DE*, II, pp. 409–10).

44 *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 47–8.

45 *DE*, IV, pp. 26–30.

46 Foucault seems to believe that Weber's principal idea was rationalization through the ages and that an ideal type was a construction that made it possible to 'recover an essence', so as to 'understand' it on the basis 'of general principles' (*DE*, IV, pp. 26–7).

47 *DE*, I, pp. 665–6, where Foucault writes of 'a subconscious with its own rules, just as the subconscious of a human individual, too, has its own rules and determining forces'.

48 R.-P. Droit, *Michel Foucault, entretiens*, pp. 22 and 135. This is an idea of Nietzsche's.

CHAPTER 3 FOUCAULT'S SCEPTICISM

1 *DE*, IV, p. 632.
2 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 203.
3 Flaubert, letters dated 18 February 1859 and 3 July 1860. In 1858, in the *Revue des deux mondes*, Renan penned the following programmatic lines: 'The historical sciences seem to me destined to replace abstract, scholastic philosophy in the solution of the problems that these days most seriously preoccupy the human mind. Without presuming to deny man the faculty of using intuition to pass beyond the field of experimental knowledge, it would appear that one may recognize that, for him, there are really only two kinds of sciences, natural science and human science. All that lies beyond them may be felt, perceived or be revealed, but cannot be demonstrated. History, by which I mean the history of the human mind, is, in this sense, the true philosophy of our times. Every question these days inevitably degenerates into a historical debate; every exposition of principles becomes a history lecture.'
4 It was as a participant in the government of his city that Socrates refused to flee, and allowed himself to be put to death: he was not just a docile citizen ruled by an illegal and tyrannical government, but a constitutive part of the city, which rested upon respect for the Law. He did not want to set an example of disobedience to the Laws. A member of the Resistance in 1940–4, in contrast, considered himself subjected to an illegal, illegitimate government.
5 For that, basically, is the real subject of Machiavelli's *The Prince*: teaching the prince how to preserve his power over his principality.
6 One evening, Foucault said to me, 'Do those massacres surprise you? But, you know, on the eve of the battle of Wagram, someone said to Napoleon, "Sire, this battle will be useless, so what is the point of having one hundred thousand men killed for nothing?" Napoleon's reply was, "A man like me doesn't give a damn about the death of a hundred thousand men."'
7 *DE*, IV, pp. 706–7.
8 On Spinoza's denial of universals, see M. Gueroult, *Spinoza* (Aubier, 1968 and 1974), I, pp. 156, 413, 443; II, p. 339; see

also the qualifications added by G. Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Minuit, 1968), pp. 256–7.

9 So anything is possible: maybe Heidegger was right! Perhaps Aristotle's active reason does exist. Perhaps Georg Simmel was right to suppose that the soul is not a substance, but a function that will remain the same even in entirely different conditions of reality (G. Simmel, 'Lebensanschauung', in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. XVI (Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 209–425). But that is not the point – which is that we have no way of knowing. But what about the amazement provoked by 'nature', the sight of a tree or an insect, when one thinks of their incredible internal architecture . . .? 'Nature' knows everything about physics and chemistry. So Darwinism took over . . .

10 *DE*, II, p. 242.

11 *DE*, II, p. 103. 'There is no need to take into account the subject, man as a subject, in order to analyse the history of understanding' (*DE*, I, p. 775).

12 Ulrich J. Schneider, *Michel Foucault* (Darmstadt, 2004), p. 79.

13 *DE*, I, p. 608.

14 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 130. *DE*, IV, p. 75; III, p. 469: 'We are nothing but what has already been said.' See *DE*, I, p. 503, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 210. 'Words and meaning are generated by the "set-up", not by human nature. So where there is a sign, there is no human being; where signs are made to do the talking, human beings must remain silent.'

15 *DE*, IV, p. 75.

16 An oral comment of Foucault's, responding to an objection from me.

17 Compare M. Gueroult, *Spinoza*, op. cit., I, pp. 413–19.

18 P. Janet, *De l'angoisse à l'extase* (Alcan, 1926 (1976)).

19 'We were seized by anger at the facts', in opposition to the irenic defenders of Stalinism (*DE*, III, p. 277). On this episode, see D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains* (Fayard, 1994), p. 344.

20 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, IX, 66, translated by R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library).

21 Compare the analysis by Jean Laporte, *Le problème de l'abstraction* (Alcan, 1940). The knowledge that a herbivore

has of grass, the abstract and general idea that it has, is guided by its 'tendency' (Laporte's word) to feed on grass.

22 For a singular object (as comprehended) may be general (in extension) and be repeated numerically; a circle and the number 37 are 'singular natures', in Cartesian terms (37 is different from 36 and also from 38), but they reoccur wherever we come upon them: there are 37 people in this room, so-and-so possesses 37 books. As Bergson pointed out, 'It is grass in general that attracts a herbivore.'

23 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 47.

24 There is one phrase of Foucault's that makes me uneasy: 'Such a history of the referent is no doubt possible; and I have no wish to exclude any effort to uncover and free these *prediscursive* experiences from the tyranny of the text' (*Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 47–8). Is not Foucault here striving not to seem too trenchant or dogmatic? It is hard to see how access to a pre-discursive referent could be possible, or how a description could be neutral. The mere delimitation of an object already presupposes the adoption of a particular attitude, a 'discourse'. How far can sexuality go? Is an artistic nude chaste? Is a religious trance a wave of madness?

25 *The Birth of the Clinic*, translated by A. M. Sheridan (Tavistock Publications, 1973), Preface, p. xix: 'What counts in the things said by men [their discourse] is not so much what they may have thought or the extent to which these things represent their thoughts, as that which systemizes them from the outset, thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the task of transforming them.'

26 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 47.

27 See Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, ed. Coli-Montinari, Band III, 2 [154].

28 That kernel indubitably exists. For example, the unequal statistical distribution of certain constant human traits throughout universal history shows that there is a kernel of reality over and above 'discourses'. But what is that reality? It is, for instance, noticeable that, throughout centuries and cultures, homosexuality is less frequent than heterosexuality; but that is a raw fact without meaning until such time as 'discourse' gives it one, and it authorizes no conclusions to be drawn, other than discursive, and therefore arbitrary, ones.

29 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 202–3, where it is certainly a matter of the Kantian transcendental rather than transcendence.
30 Yes, legitimately, given that Foucault himself (*DE*, II, p. 97) amuses himself by slipping into the skin of the Deleuze of *Différence et répétition* (PUF, 1968), in order to feign a metaphysics of 'pure chance' or a 'throw of the dice' (see *DE*, II, p. 100: 'we are governed by dice') and an eternal return of, not the Same, but incorporeal events and difference. At a philological level, however, he claimed to be sceptical (although using more subtle and courteous terms) when Deleuze thought that he had found, in *Zarathustra*, this doctrine of an eternal return of difference rather than of the Same. Nevertheless, Deleuze meant well . . . In *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 60, Foucault himself professes a 'philosophy of events'.
31 F. Wahl, *Le Perçu* (Fayard, 2007), p. 523, n.1.
32 *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton University Press, 2002).
33 Cicero, who really believed neither in gods nor in myths, slyly asks how it is that, in his day, the gods did not produce children and there were no announcements of divine births, whereas in the old days the gods did produce offspring?
34 *DE*, IV, p. 635.
35 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 48.

CHAPTER 4 ARCHAEOLOGY

1 See, on this point, the invaluable commentary by François Gros in *L'Herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France, 1981–1982* (Hautes Etudes-Gallimard-Seuil, 2001), pp. 23–4, n.32.
2 *DE*, IV, p. 34.
3 *DE*, IV, p. 634.
4 M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 238–9: instead of 'exhibiting the single source' of a human reality, we should look for 'the multiplicity of extraordinarily diverse processes'. . . by showing the 'phenomena of coagulation, support and reciprocal reinforcement'.
5 *DE*, IV, pp. 277 and 283: there are never any fundamental phenomena, no factor takes primacy over any other; all that

there is are mutual relationships and perpetual shifts between them.

6 *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 138.

7 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 266.

8 *DE*, IV, p. 632.

9 See *DE*, II, p. 539.

10 One example will suffice to show that none of the statements received in any era are worth any more than the rest. 'Men have judged that a king can make rain; *we* say this contradicts all experience. Today they judge that aeroplanes and the radio etc. are means for the closer contact of peoples and the spread of culture' (Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Blackwell, 1974), p. 19e, no. 132, written just before the Second World War). Here, Wittgenstein is mocking Sir James Frazer and his speculations on kings who may be rainmakers and the magic basis of their power. What is the point in seeking for a primitive mentality or mythical thought, etc.? Primitive people thought as we do or, rather, we think no better than they did.

11 Likewise, the 'sickness-pebble' extracted by an Australian medicine man from the body of a patient has nothing in common with a pebble on the road, except its name. Similarly, hearing supernatural voices is not the same as hearing real voices; in the former case, clearly the person who hears them is the only one to do so, for others present do not (Wittgenstein, *Notebooks, 1914–1916* (Oxford University Press, 1979), no. 717.

12 *DE*, IV, p. 632, and see pp. 634, 709, 713, 718. 'Game' in the English sense: the 'rules of the game' or 'of procedure', the 'rules of production'. On the relations between power-games and truth-games (relations that are variable, contingent and synthetic, not analytic: we should not say 'knowledge *is* power'), see *DE*, IV, pp. 676 and 724–6.

13 *DE*, IV, p. 632.

14 *DE*, I, p. 711; *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 126.

15 *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 61.

16 As long as sounds are not taken into consideration, etymology consists in associating words according to their meaning, at the cost of word-play, as in the *Cratylus*; or in claiming that a French word is derived from a Latin one and has the same meaning, without justifying the phonetic changes. Voltaire is

said to have mocked the etymologists of his day, saying that *cheval* (horse) came from the Latin *equus*, for the *e* had become *che* and *quus* had become *val*.

17 *DE*, IV, p. 632.

18 *DE*, I, p. 787.

19 *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 54.

20 As Foucault at first thought. See the preface to the first edition of *Histoire de la folie* (Plon, 1961), p. iii: 'Those obscure gestures by which a culture rejects anything that, for it, is Exterior.' That is why Foucault suppressed this preface in Gallimard's second edition of his book. If the void was not void and rejected beings and things were hammering on the door, there would exist no such thing as an Original All and some ideal destination or totality. But that is not at all the case; nothing is negative, everything is positive, nothing is lacking, France does not need to expand to fit within its natural frontiers.

21 For exactly two centuries, in a world in which the idea of God is receding, Hegelian dialectic has nevertheless been the major means to reconcile the hope of a better world with the perception that nowadays the Truth and the Good no longer rule: although excluded and denied, both continue to exert pressure and, by dint of effort and pain, will eventually erupt in our world and produce a 'happy ending'. In 1807, Hegel famously remarked that the idea of God 'falls into edification and even sinks into insipidity if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience and the labour of the negative' (*Phänomenologie* (Leipzig, 1949), p. 20; *Phenomenology of Mind*, translated by J. B. Baillie (Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd, 1910), p. 17).

CHAPTER 5 UNIVERSALISM, UNIVERSALS, EPIGENESIS: THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

1 This is an isolated pronouncement (*logion*) ascribed to Jesus, which Mark 10: 45, followed by Matthew 20: 28, associated with a context to which it was not related. Is the implication that Jesus died as a propitiatory or even expiatory victim and thereby delivered those who believed in him from the clutches of Satan? That, through his death, he paid Satan a ransom

that saved his disciples? Not until the following century was Christ said to ransom not just 'many', but the entire human race. The precise role of the Redeemer did not prompt theological reflection until after AD 1000 (in the earliest centuries, theological speculation focused primarily on the relations between humanity and the divinity of Jesus, who was regarded above all as a Healer and a Shepherd). The image of Christ crucified did not appear in the figurative arts until the 400s.

2 A similar plurality of modes (or 'levels') of truth obtains in so far as the future life is concerned. Jesus dispatched his twelve disciples solely to Israel. Yet he came 'to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20: 28; Mark 10: 45) and that 'many' included pagans, Gentiles, and the peoples of the rest of the Nations: they, or at least the Just among them (according to the terms of pre-Covenant justice, when the peoples had not yet been divided), would accede to Salvation at the time of the final Banquet in the Holy Kingdom (see John P. Meier, *Jesus, a Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library, 2001)). This was certainly universalism of a kind, but of what kind or kinds? The god that Jesus had in mind when he sent out the twelve solely to Israel was the God of Sinai, the god who entered into the Covenant with the people of Israel. The dispatch of the twelve was a *hic et nunc* affair which concerned the jealous God of Sinai. In contrast, the Kingdom of Heaven was to belong to a temporality other than our own, a supernatural time comparable to that in which the pagan gods were still producing offspring. Although given a common identity, the two gods respectively of those two temporalities were not one and the same. The one on whose behalf the twelve apostles were sent on a mission to Israel was the god of the existing Israel, *hic et nunc*, the Jealous God of the Covenant. In contrast, the God of that supernatural Kingdom was to be the Cosmic God, the one who, long ago, *in illo tempore*, made heaven and earth and, without distinguishing at all between nations, fabricated Man, that is to say all men, mankind. In other words, the modal distinction drawn here is the same as that which Wittgenstein draws between the bay tree of Daphne and that of the Greek peasants. On the implicit distinction between those two modalities of the god revered in Israel – the creator of all things and the jealous god solely of Israel – I

refer readers to my little book, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, in which, on pp. 269–71, I discuss this well-known dualism.

3 The Gospel according to St Matthew 15: 24–6. On all that follows, see John P. Meier, op. cit., vols 2 and 3 *passim*; for example, vol. 3, pp. 123, 164–5, 190, 553.

4 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Band III, para. 278.

5 For eight centuries, the prophets and the psalms had been preaching that a day would come when all the other peoples would make their way to Jerusalem, to bow down before the god of Israel, whose superiority was recognized by the rest of the gods, in heaven.

6 In response to Jesus, who told her that he would not give the bread of the Children of Israel away to those dogs, the pagans, the woman from Canaan said, 'Yet dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the tables of their masters' (Matthew 15: 27). It seems that this episode is not an authentic event in the life of the historical Jesus (John P. Meier, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 374), but was invented later so as to justify opening the Church to pagans.

7 On the complicated details of the doctrine of St Paul, the basis of which is assured, whereas its formulations and bold assertions lack solid foundations, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 84–100 and 122–8.

8 Joseph Ratzinger, in *Offenbarung und Uberlieferung*, Quaestiones disputatae (Fribourg-Basle-Vienna, 1965); translated into French by Desclée de Brouwer, as *Révélation et tradition* (1972), p. 64: 'It was only a series of historical obstacles – among which special mention should be made of the executions of Stephen and James and, finally and decisively, the imprisonment of Peter and his escape that led to the creation of the Church rather than the (Heavenly) Kingdom.'

9 Matthew 22: 1–10; Luke 14: 15–24 (which mentions the famous *compelle intrare*).

CHAPTER 6 NOTWITHSTANDING HEIDEGGER, MAN IS AN INTELLIGENT ANIMAL

1 I allude to the little book of my youth, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, translated by P. Wissing (Chicago University

Press, 1988), in which many of the trees are true, but the wood itself is a flight of fancy. I now share Bernard Williams's opinion of that book; Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 298, n.25, who writes of 'an extravagant relativism about truth, or worse', but charitably adds, 'The many interesting ideas in the book are independent of this rhetoric.' You can see the muddle into which a historian lacking sufficient philosophical training may fall when, in the course of his work, he comes across problems such as myth, which inevitably contain a philosophical dimension. What I mean concerns problems that are very abstract. The trouble was that I had confused two questions, that of the plurality of 'modes of belief' (an expression that I learnt from Raymond Aron) and that of truth in time (about which Foucault had spoken to me), and I had sounded off on the latter. Had I read Wittgenstein or understood Foucault more fully, I might have done a better job.

2 Hume, in the name of his empiricism, would not (retroactively) have believed in a Kantian faculty to form synthetic judgements a priori. Nor did Foucault believe in this, describing it as an 'empirico-transcendental doublet'. (We shall be returning to this point.)

3 Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, 'On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense', translated by Daniel Breazeale (Humanities Press Inc., 1979), p. 79.

4 On humanity as a biological species and for a critique of the nature/culture opposition, see J.-M. Schaeffer, *La Fin de l'exception humaine* (Gallimard, 2007). In my view, this is a book both personal and profound, carefully thought through and extremely well-informed on philosophy and ethology.

5 D. Janicaud, *L'Ombre de cette pensée: Heidegger et la question politique* (Jérôme Millon, 1990), p. 152. On the stormy question of Heidegger's Nazism and ongoing lack of remorse, see Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: l'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie* (Albin Michel, 2005).

6 D. Janicaud, op. cit., pp. 97–108. This critique is particularly interesting because Janicaud, whom I knew slightly and who was a noble person, was himself nostalgic for Spirit and deeply admired Heidegger.

7 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, in *Questions I*; *Time and Being*, and in *Questions IV*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Harper and Row, 1972). *The Order of Things*, p. 331, is, without naming him, aimed at Heidegger and tackles the historico-original 'doublet'.

8 Events such as Greek thought and Germanic philosophy, which carried with them an entire culture, since philosophy is the key (or the metonymy . . .) of every historical era. Before 1945, Heidegger, although unconcerned about everyday and historical man, extended to the Aryan race or Germanic people the privilege of glimpsing truth, thanks to their *Dasein*. After 1945, Heidegger obviously never again mentioned this and remained in a political state of waiting, with never a word of remorse for his Nazi past. An Event, which 'modifies the essence of the truth' (Heidegger wrote, in his fine book on Nietzsche), comes about 'suddenly and unexpectedly', *jäh und unversehens*, as the *Holzwege*, p. 311, puts it. This Mystery, through the ages, 'sends' us its invisible visibility in the form of the successive apparitions constituted by Greek *Physis*, *Logos* and the Platonic Ideas (or Forms), the Neoplatonist One, Spinozist Substance, Schopenhauer's Will and, lastly, the Will of Nietzschean power. Heidegger did manage to say what this Mystery really is: an entity so different from everything else that it is Difference itself. In this way, metaphysics, which failed to recognize Difference and was bent on seeking Being or God, came to an end.

9 According to an observation of Jean Beaufret's, cited by Françoise Dastur in her luminous comments on Heidegger, in *Histoire de la philosophie* (vol. III) of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*.

10 According to Heidegger in his later years, Being has nothing in common with the Being of previous philosophers and religions, but is like a person who calls out, then draws away and hides and who, for just a few *Zukünftige*, 'future men', will be 'the last god'. See L. Oeing-Hanhoff, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. V, on the entry 'Metaphysik', col. 1272; R. Malter, vol. IX, on the entry 'Sein, Seiendes' (Being), col. 219. Heidegger's thought is a desperate attempt to prolong, by other means, a sensibility that is religious (or even Christian, since the various paganisms offer nothing like it).

11 Man must prove himself worthy of his situation in the face of Being, must be authentic and not lose himself inauthentically in vain curiosities (*Sein und Zeit*, p. 170), metaphysics and techniques, and must not believe that a knowledge of 'what is' is the very last word. The Old Testament declares 'the Eternal is my Shepherd'; but Heidegger says specifically that, on the contrary, man is the shepherd of Being and is in duty bound not to forget it and not to be distracted by other things, in his intuition of 'what simply is'.
12 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 226. On Heidegger's lack of distinction between origin and essence, see n.13.
13 I am here paraphrasing pp. 75–8 of Heidegger's seminar on the essence of truth (*Gesamtausgabe, II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen*, Band 34: *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, Klostermann, 1988).
14 Alexandre Koyré, 'L'évolution de Heidegger', in his *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Gallimard, 1971), p. 288.
15 D. Janicaud, *La Puissance du rationnel* (Gallimard, 1985), p. 281.
16 D. Janicaud, *L'Ombre de cette pensée*, op. cit., pp. 102–34. Simon Critchley, in *Dominique Janicaud, l'intelligence du partage*, texts collected by Françoise Dastur (Belin, 2006), p. 168.
17 D. Janicaud, *La Puissance du rationnel*, *passim*.
18 *DE*, IV, p. 703.
19 *DE*, IV, p. 774. Foucault's italics.
20 Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, para. 7: 'non-truth as restless wandering'.
21 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 310.
22 *DE*, III, p. 159.
23 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 63.
24 Leibnitz declares that, in Spinoza, 'everything, apart from God [in other words, apart from Nature itself, is fleeting and fades away in simple accidents and modifications.
25 G. Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, op. cit., p. 306.
26 See, for example, *DE*, III, pp. 154, 268, 528–31, 594: 'Zola is a typical case. He did not write *Germinal* as a miner.' Foucault sought information and, to that end, sometimes found himself participating in, for example, a colloquium of, not professors of philosophy, but nurses.

CHAPTER 7 THE PHYSICAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES: FOUCAULT'S PROGRAMME

1 See Victor Brochard's 'defence and illustration' of 'empirical scepticism', *Les Sceptiques grecs* (1887; reprinted Livre de Poche, 2002), pp. 344–91. Foucault, who was both a son and a grandson of doctors, was a distant descendant of a Greek doctor belonging to the philosophical sect of sceptics, namely Sextus Empiricus, who believed that hidden things were inaccessible but was nevertheless an empirical doctor belonging to the medical 'Methodist' sect.

2 *DE*, IV, p. 577. Foucault does not pursue this idea. He was not really interested in the problems of the human sciences.

3 In *Le Raisonnement sociologique: un espace non poppérien de l'argumentation*, a new and expanded edition (Albin Michel, 2006), pp. 361–84, J.-C. Passeron substitutes Pierce's notion of indexation for Weber's notion of stylization. His analysis leads to the conclusion that every sociological concept is a 'semi-proper noun' and that all historical reasoning is an assortment of *deictics*. Thus, the ideal type is not an approximative instrument of a soft science, a weak form of induction, as it is generally said to be: it is a semi-proper noun the meaning (*Sinn*) of which is defined by an invariably partial description that enumerates a few generic properties, the denotation (*Bedeutung*) of which is effected by an 'indexation' covering an open series of referents that constitute so many singular cases (medieval society in the West, Japan prior to the Tokugawa, or even the Byzantine Empire which, according to Evelyne Patlagean, was feudal) – singular cases that are all analogous in that they present those generic properties. The definition is limited to a series of characteristics (feudalism combines two characteristics: possession of the land and government of the people), whereas a complete description of the referents would be interminable. Thus, in default of a description both finite and complete, *a historical definition cannot be separated from its referents: these must not be forgotten*, for they alone can make it possible to know what is going on, what is being talked about and hence how one reasons about them. This is not a methodological choice; rather, it is founded upon an epistemology of historical knowledge and historicity: the list of indexed cases is open-

ended because nothing but singularities exist, and the definition is partial because it is limited to the analogies that the cases under consideration present. What is involved is not the rigour of the physical sciences, but all the same it is rigour of a kind: one cannot say just anything. Such an ideal type stands in opposition to a scientist's chimera of a trans-historical model that is not indexed on an assortment of cases with their spatio-temporal coordinates. The language of a historian does not use universals; nor does his reasoning. Even adverbs such as 'always' and evidence of causality remain indexed on a finite series of cases: the 'always' and the 'because' of cases of feudalism do not carry the same meanings as those terms do in regulated societies.

4 J.-C. Passeron, *Le Raisonnement sociologique*, op. cit., p. 349.

5 Here is an example that comes to mind: Mireille Corbier has recently described the Roman imperial monarchy better than Mommsen did in his *Droit public romain*. It was a very particular kind of monarchy that was hereditary in one sense but not in another. Her description refers to the multiplicity of identificatory differences and probing little details. See M. Corbier, 'Parenté et pouvoir à Rome', in *Rome et l'Etat moderne européen*, ed. J.-P. Genet (Ecole française de Rome, 2007), pp. 173–92.

6 Alexandre Koyré has shown how philosophical speculations of the most vague nature contributed, in the Renaissance, to the origins of experimental and quantified physics.

7 Since our faculty of knowing is finite, an amusing question arises, that of the limits of our intelligence and whether this intelligence enables us to perceive its own limits. My cat, which manages its existence very well, scratches, out of jealousy, at the book that I am reading. He understands that I am not paying him enough attention, but has no idea what a book might be. Colin McGinn studies the question of limits in a passage of rigorous reasoning in his *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry* (Blackwell, 1993), p. 154 in particular, in which he jokingly suggests that no doubt 'talented Martians quite naturally possess the solutions to our problems'. Kant himself considered the question right in the middle of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, sections 3 and 8 of *Transcendental Aesthetics*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W.

Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 177 and 185, as Thierry Marchaisse has pointed out to me: 'We cannot judge at all whether the intuitions of other thinking beings are bound to the same conditions [of space and time] that limit our intuition and that are universally valid for us . . . We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us and which therefore does not necessarily pertain to every being though, to be sure, it pertains to every human being.'

8 I. Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

9 I. Hacking's account of his own doctrine in the *Annuaire du Collège de France* (2003), pp. 544–6. Hacking also cites Foucault's *epistēmai* as a framework of thought of the same type.

10 *DE*, II, p. 165, or I, p. 675.

11 *DE*, IV, p. 769.

12 *DE*, IV, p. 703.

13 *The Order of Things*, p. 370, and see p. 372: 'By revealing the law of time as the external boundary of the human sciences, History shows that everything that has been thought will be thought again by a thought that does not yet exist.'

14 *DE*, I, p. 611.

15 *DE*, I, p. 620.

16 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 122 f.

17 For this expression, see *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 16.

18 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 122 f.

19 Ibid., p. 206.

20 *DE*, IV, p. 575.

21 *DE*, I, p. 611.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., pp. 611–12.

24 *DE*, I, p. 612.

25 Ibid.

26 *The Order of Things*, p. 372.

27 Ibid., p. 384.

28 *DE*, I, p. 710.

29 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 205.

30 *DE*, I, p. 710.

31 Ibid., p. 515.

32 On this 'finitude without infinity', see *The Order of Things*, pp. 316–18.

33 See *The Order of Things*, pp. 372–3. I think it fair to say that historicism has set up as a philosophical attitude the spontaneous *epochē* (suspension of belief) of historians, that is to say their axiological neutrality, which reports the beliefs of the past without judging them: for example, G. Simmel, whose position on this is close to Foucault's. What interests Simmel is *life*, whose richness and variety overflow concepts that are too narrow (love is far more than that to which Plato's *Symposium* reduces it) – life that is too vast for anyone to presume to censure the Greeks for having believed their myths. For Simmel, whose thinking is so receptive and whose attention to detail so rewarding, does philosophy still constitute a quest for the truth? Philosophy possesses its own vital truth, or rather richness – or, rather, the philosopher does. In this type of human being, Simmel salutes a sensibility that is different from the sensibility of the empiricist scholar – a different dimension, a sense of totality. He writes: 'It is naive to judge philosophical conclusions as one judges the results of experimental sciences.' Should one even ask oneself whether a philosophy is true or false? According to Simmel, we are bound to recognize that various doctrines are contradictory: this is because each one of them (or at least each of those most fully elaborated) embodies a human point of view which is possible, just as nature comprises a great number of different living beings, all of which are equally viable.

34 Descartes, letter dated 15 April 1630. St Augustine encountered a similar problem: Divine Law has changed. That which God presented to Moses allowed polygamy, whereas the new Law prohibits it. The reason for this is that Providence made its demands proportional to the degree of education achieved by humanity in each epoch.

35 *DE*, III, p. 158.

36 *DE*, II, pp. 143–4; and see III, p. 402: 'What rule is one obliged to obey in a given epoch, when one wishes to produce scientific discourse on life, natural history or the political economy?'

37 *DE*, IV, p. 632.

38 Ibid., p. 277.

39 Ibid., p. 634.

40 Ibid., p. 635.

41 Ibid., pp. 54–5.

42 *DE*, IV, p. 733; see p. 718.
43 See the commentary by V. Marchetti and A. Salomoni, in M. Foucault, *Les Anormaux* (Hautes Etudes-Gallimard-Seuil, 1999), p. 316.
44 *L'Impossible prison*, p. 51; *DE*, IV, p. 30.
45 *DE*, III, p. 158, for all the above.
46 Ibid., p. 160.
47 Ibid.
48 *DE*, IV, p. 30, and III, p. 258.
49 The last witches to be burnt alive were killed in Spain in 1799 and in the Swiss canton of Uri in 1801.
50 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 131.

CHAPTER 8 A SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY OF TRUTHS: KNOWLEDGE, POWER, THE SET-UP

1 *DE*, IV, p. 726.
2 *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 20.
3 Foucault again used this expression in 1984, in *DE*, IV, p. 632.
4 Ibid., p. 634. This was what Foucault was to call 'problematization'.
5 *DE*, IV, p. 445.
6 *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 16.
7 Whatever is sometimes claimed, Nietzsche never did say that no truth existed; see Dominique Janicaud, in the collection *Michel Foucault philosophe: rencontre international* (Seuil, 1989), pp. 331–53, 346, and in *A nouveau la philosophie*, op. cit., p. 75.
8 *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 19.
9 *DE*, IV, pp. 727 and 740.
10 *DE*, IV, p. 720.
11 Interview of Foucault conducted by R.-P. Droit, op. cit., p. 129.
12 See *DE*, IV, p. 450, and, in the index to *Dits et Ecrits*, under the entry *Pouvoir*, numerous other texts, many of them detailed.
13 *DE*, IV, pp. 225–6, 740; and elsewhere too (see *Résistance* in the index).
14 *DE*, II, p. 636.

15 Ibid., p. 723.
16 *DE*, IV, pp. 724–5 and 676. See also p. 726.
17 Interview of Foucault conducted by R.-P. Droit, op. cit., p. 128.
18 *DE*, IV, p. 782.
19 *DE*, III, p. 143; see also III, p. 402: 'What rule is one obliged to obey, in a particular era, when one wishes to produce scientific discourse on life, natural history and political economy?'
20 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 209.
21 I am citing from old editions that I have to hand: Nietzsche, *Umvertung aller Werte* (Würzbach, 1977), p. 268, n.85, and p. 302, n.190; *La Volonté de puissance*, translated by Bianquis (1995), p. 249, n.91, and p. 290, n.196.
22 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Band III, 7 [53].
23 *DE*, IV, p. 693.
24 For example, *DE*, II, pp. 305, 632, 638.
25 See, in particular, *DE*, IV, p. 597.
26 *DE*, IV, p. 597; see also p. 180.
27 Ibid., p. 180.
28 Interview of Foucault conducted by R.-P. Droit, June 1975, published in the *Dossier* on Foucault that appeared in *Le Monde*, 19 and 20 September 2004.
29 See, for example, *DE*, IV, p. 693.
30 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 208.
31 I am freely interpreting *DE*, IV, p. 205. See also I, p. 608, and *The Order of Things*, p. 322 ff. For some philosophies that were not those of Foucault but that did belong to his era, man, that empirico-transcendental doublet, is both an empirical object to be understood and a subject that is the basis for the possibility of such understanding; he is both the object and the author of his history.
32 *DE*, I, pp. 816–17. It has to be said, to excuse that violence, that his interlocutor was a Marxist whose dogmatism, at once brutal and limited, nowadays makes one smile pityingly. One oral tradition claims that Foucault threw out a bone to whet the appetite of young admirers who thought they were acclaiming him by calling him a structuralist. Right at the end of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, he apparently directed at his audience the following disdainful words: 'If you are *intrigued* by this even though it tells you nothing, I shall, in the course of my lectures, be speaking of structural-

ism.' Those words never appeared in the printed text of his lecture.

33 *DE*, I, pp. 126–7 and 446.

34 This is what, ever since H. Schaeffer (1930), has been called 'the conceptual image' of the human body. In Egypt, it is very rare for a face to be represented in a front or three-quarter view in any painting or bas-relief. Exceptions are only found in the case of sub-humans (prisoners of war or female dancers).

35 H. Wölfflin, *Réflexions sur l'histoire de l'art*, French translation by Rochlitz, 1982 (Flammarion, 1997), p. 43.

36 *Réflexions*, pp. 43–4, and, for what follows, pp. 29, 35, 79, 198.

37 *Principes fondamentaux de l'histoire de l'art*, French translation by Raymond, 1929, p. 215.

38 *Réflexions*, pp. 43–4.

39 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 209; *DE*, I, p. 788.

40 As Foucault stated several times, for example, in *DE*, IV, p. 393. In 1970, the problem was glimpsed only in a confused fashion.

41 In the all too famous last sentence of *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*).

42 *DE*, IV, p. 75.

43 *DE*, IV, p. 535: 'By aestheticism, I mean the transformation of oneself.'

44 *DE*, IV, pp. 171, 213, 576, 706, 729, 731, and, in particular, p. 785.

45 P. Pasquino, 'Moderne Subjekt und der Wille zum Wissen', *Anschlüsse: Versuche nach Michel Foucault*, ed. G. Dane (Tübingen, 1985), p. 39; W. Essbach, 'Durkheim, Weber, Foucault: Religion, Ethos und Lebensführung', in *Ethique protestante de Max Weber et l'esprit de la modernité*, *Max Webers protestantische Ethik und der Geist der Moderne* (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1997), p. 261.

46 M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Relionssoziologie* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1920; 1963), vol. I, p. 524: 'durchaus gegen seinen Willen'.

47 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 203 and 408; see also p. 485 (where *Ethos* is picked up by *Lebensführung*).

48 *DE*, IV, p. 719.

49 *The Use of Pleasure*, translated by Robert Hurley (Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 11–12.

50 *DE*, IV, p. 449.
51 Ibid., p. 574.
52 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 203.
53 *DE*, IV, p. 436.
54 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 203–4; *DE*, I, pp. 774–5. To the objection that this critique is positivism that is blind to the transcendental dimension or the meta-empirical origins (*Arch.*, p. 205), Foucault responded with a critique of the 'historico-transcendental doublet' (see *Arch.*, p. 121), 'tautology' (*Arch.*, p. 206; *DE*, I, p. 675) or 'paralogism' (*DE*, I, p. 452) that tries to evaluate human beings via economics, science, language, etc., 'as the basis of his own finitude' (*The Order of Things*, p. 342), through a 'repetition of the positive within the fundamental' (p. 315). Historical positivities, all circumscribed within an epoch, *ensure* that man is a finite being; meanwhile, finitude is assumed to *render possible* historicity as its a priori condition of possibility (p. 372).
55 Let me again refer readers to Part II of *The Order of Things*. See G. Lebrun's study of Foucault as a critic of Husserl, in *Michel Foucault, philosophe. Rencontre internationale* (Seuil, 1989), pp. 33–53. For what follows, see Renan, *Essais de morale et de critique* (1860, pp. 82–3), reprinted in the definitive edition of *Oeuvres complètes* (Calmann-Lévy, 1948), vol. II, pp. 73–4.
56 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 203.
57 *DE*, IV, p. 718.
58 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 201.
59 *DE*, IV, p. 74. Whoever is involved either actively or passively in a large or small power-relationship – in other words, everyone – can either accept it or revolt against it (*DE*, IV, p. 93). But such a revolt will not be a kind of return of what has been suppressed, a return to an original liberty or of the true nature of a person no longer alienated (IV, pp. 74 and 710). Our transgressions of limits are themselves limited; moreover, we cannot deploy a total knowledge here or even know completely and definitively where our limits lie (IV, p. 575).
60 *The Order of Things*, p. 320.
61 *DE*, IV, p. 574.
62 I do not believe in any 'fold' within which Foucault may have rediscovered the Subject. Deleuze, a noble character and an original thinker, spoke in this connection, not as the great

historian of philosophy that he was, but as a personal thinker dreaming his own thoughts in the shadow of other thinkers (something that, as he confessed, he was prone to do) and attributing those thoughts to the latter. See *DE*, IV, p. 445.

63 See *DE*, IV, p. 449: Foucault's advice is to follow along today's lines of fragility, in order to grasp where and how whatever exists today might no longer do so, for that virtual crack opens up 'a space of liberty, understood as a concrete space of liberty, that is to say for a possible transformation of the "discourse"'.

64 A. Thibaudet, *Réflexions sur la littérature*, ed. Compagnon et Pradeau (Gallimard, coll. Quarto, 2007), p. 1416.

65 See Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité*, II.3, ch. 5: 'It is because of our union with all men that we live according to opinion.'

66 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Band II, 34 [147].

CHAPTER 9 WAS FOUCAULT A CORRUPTER OF THE YOUNG? WAS HE THE DESPAIR OF THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT?

1 It is amusing to note that Nietzsche, so adept at interpreting the values and aims of others, did not notice the arbitrary nature of his own, which were to encourage 'the efforts of nature [elsewhere he uses the word 'biology'] to produce a superior human type' (*Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Band III, 8 [4]; Band IV, 9 [1] (2) 4; 9 [91] (85) D). This great doubter was never in doubt that 'the destiny of the human race depends upon the success of its highest model' (Band I, 26 [75], para. 1) or that one should go along with natural evolution and the Will of power, just as others have gone along with the sense of history. And he constantly deplores egalitarianism and mercy, those 'aberrations of humans with regard to fundamental instincts' (Band IV, 11 (227)). He undertook his philosophical revolution as a prophet, in order to 'carry the human type to splendour and the highest degree of its power' (Band III, 5 (98) 1); and to make possible the advent of 'a number of superior men', who would be 'the masters of the other men' (Band I, 27 [23], *Zarathustra* 3) or rather would not even bother to be (Band IV, 9 [149–51] (102–4)): 'masters of the earth, a new ruling caste' from which, from time to time, a

Superman would emerge (Band II, 35 [73], II). He was even ready to 'sacrifice the development of humanity', now reduced to slavery, in order to 'make it possible for a species superior to man to exist' (Band III, 7 = Mp XVII 3b. 7 [6]). 'But', one might object, 'if the Will to power rules everywhere, it is surely capable, on its own, of that task, without involving the rest of us, so why should we have a duty to involve ourselves?' Similarly, how could we add to universal gravitation and, anyway, what would be the point? It should quickly be added that Nietzsche was not thinking of Germany, for which he felt nothing but disdain (Band II, 43 [3]): he preferred Jews and Slavs. That disdain was equalled only by his scorn for 'the anti-Semitic underworld' (Band II, 34 [224]; 34 [237]; Band III, 7 [67]; Band IV, 9 [109] (73); 9 [124] (82)); *Beyond Good and Evil* (para. 251), and 'racial swindling' (Band III, 5 [52]); for 'a mingling of the races' was more favourable to his great prophetic hopes (Band III, 1 [153]).

2 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2002), paras 37 and 39: 'No one would consider a doctrine to be true just because it makes people happy or virtuous [. . .] Something could be true even if it is harmful and dangerous to the highest degree. It could even be part of the fundamental character of existence that people with complete knowledge get destroyed.'

3 We should not harbour an over-schematic idea of 'man'. He also likes to justify himself or rather to indulge in dreams which he holds dear and in which he believes. The profession of a religious or civic ideal affords him a Platonic satisfaction and that dream may suffice. However, we need to distinguish between such a professed morality and a practised morality, for, without hypocrisy, the two may differ greatly; and the difference may not even be perceived. Simmel somewhere remarks that Christianity offered the masses, for the first time in history, a complete sense of existence. Maybe. But how did this affect behaviour? Did the Christian dogmas daily and fully so model European societies as to count as their roots? For example, did they in any way alter human beings' attitude in the face of death? As has already been noted, the world in which one thinks is not the world in which one lives.

4 The philosopher Jules Vuillemin, who was very close to Foucault and had proposed and supported his election to the

Collège de France, nevertheless, in his funeral oration, delivered at the Collège in 1984, declared that the philosophy of the deceased consisted in denying what one had always believed, that is to say the truth, normality and morality.

5 A. Diemer, *Edmund Husserl, Versuch einer systematischen Darstellung der Phänomenologie* (Meisenheim, 1965), p. 101. Whatever is interesting and is an object of curiosity constitutes a motivation that is all too often overlooked. Yet it is a motivation that is as specific and as important as any other. It cannot be confused with any other motivation and has played an important role in history (the Roman plebs' interest in Circus games was so great that, according to Juvenal, it caused them to forget matters of higher politics). Philosophy, Circus races, football and culture in general are all interesting (the pleasure derived from music and poetry is something else, although, in other aspects, the arts *too* are interesting). It is fair enough to detail the pleasures of football as opposed to rugby, but they are both nevertheless interesting in a particular specific way. It is because football is interesting and consequently even inspiring, respectable and elevated that it can fuel political passions, as too can religion, meanwhile remaining itself and not being subject to reductionism. It cannot, unless out of fecklessness, be claimed that warfare or love are interesting, or that making money or governing people is interesting; for those are passions of a different kind. Nor can it be said that attending Mass is 'interesting'. A game seems to be yet another matter: the emotions of a footballer are not those of the spectators watching the game, just as the emotions of a novelist are not those felt by his readers. Exploits, the taste of danger and the wish to 'outdo oneself' – in navigation, say, or mountain-climbing – are something else again. The specificity of whatever is interesting remains peculiar to it.

6 It has often been observed that ethical crusades against the scandals of an age (slavery, colonialism) begin or multiply when those scandals are soon to be abolished or when those oppressed begin to revolt. It is not that the crusaders are bent on securing victory; but they indistinctly sense that those scandals are scandalous in themselves and, as a heritage of a barbaric past, are condemned by history and unworthy 'of our own times'.

7 *DE*, IV, p. 79.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 756.
10 *DE*, III, p. 135.
11 J.-C. Passeron, *Itinéraire d'un sociologue: trames, bifurcations, rencontres* (La Découverte, 2008).
12 As it often is by politicians, in particular by socialist ones (as Foucault told me, around 1982, the implication being: 'despite the fact that critical thinkers such as himself might well be considered to be more to the left than Conservatives').
13 *DE*, IV, p. 580.
14 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 130: bearing in mind that our own presuppositions remain unknowable to us and impossible to get around, Foucault hesitated: should archaeology therefore, for preference, study the most distant past? But can it give up knowing *itself* just a bit, so should it stick to studying the immediate past, in order to define us by way of a difference from that which is closest to us?
15 *DE*, IV, pp. 564 and 680–1; and, previously, III, p. 783.
16 See, above all, *DE*, I, p. 665, and IV, p. 568; see I, pp. 580 and 613; III, p. 266.
17 *DE*, IV, p. 543.
18 *DE*, I, p. 710.
19 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 131.
20 *DE*, IV, p. 449.
21 *DE*, III, p. 266.
22 On the notion of problematization, *DE*, IV, pp. 612 and 670.
23 *DE*, IV, p. 597.
24 Ibid., pp. 575 and 577.
25 *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 9.
26 *DE*, IV, p. 160. See also IV, p. 779: 'All my analyses go against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They underline the arbitrary nature of institutions.'
27 Ibid., pp. 30 and 449.
28 *DE*, IV, pp. 571, 574, 680.
29 Ibid., p. 449.
30 *DE*, IV, p. 676.
31 *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 9.
32 *DE* III, p. 634.
33 *DE*, IV, p. 724.
34 *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 3.

35 *DE*, IV, p. 667.
36 In 2007, it was acceptable to be against America, nuclear energy and bull-fighting (and hunting). Reading Nietzsche's posthumous papers, it is amusing to discover that, in 1885, Richard Wagner was praised for 'combining all that is good today: he is anti-Semitic, vegetarian and detests vivisection' (Band II, 41 [2] 7).
37 *Confessions*, X.23, translated by William Watts (Loeb Classical Library, 1970).
38 *DE*, I, p. 619.
39 *Ethics*, III, 9, scholie.
40 'Consider Tartuffe: he is fat and ugly but he seduces an entire household with a single word. The title of the play could well be *Tartuffe or the Psychoanalyst*,' said Foucault, who was a great admirer of *Tartuffe* and went to see the play whenever it was performed.
41 Plato, *Republic*, 440b ff.
42 *DE*, IV, p. 673. As Peter Brown says, in *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Blackwell, 2003), 2nd edn, p. 208, with the Christians, care for the soul became care for others, through condescendence (*synkatabasis*), in the original sense of the word.
43 *DE*, III, p. 634; see *DE*, IV, p. 667.
44 *DE*, IV, p. 536.
45 Ibid., pp. 211–13, 261–9, 338–41, 344–6, etc.
46 As the cover of the first edition of *L'Histoire de la folie* stated (I am citing from memory).
47 J.-C. Passeron, *Itinéraire d'un sociologue*, op. cit. These talented pages bring to life Foucault, the militant and 'specific intellectual' – the antithesis of a 'generic intellectual', such as Pierre Bourdieu.
48 *DE*, II, p. 446.
49 As one can see in vol. I of *DE*, pp. 13–64.

CHAPTER 10 FOUCAULT AND POLITICS

1 Wilhelm Schmid, *Auf der Suche nach einer neuen Lebenskunst: die Frage nach dem Grund und die Neubegrüdung der Ethik bei Foucault* (Suhrkamp, 1991).
2 See for example *DE*, III, p. 570.

3 It is worth briefly reminding readers that 'care of the soul', far from being a kind of Narcissism or dandyism, involved taking care of oneself in order to establish a basis of liberty, through self-control (*DE*, IV, p. 729).
4 *DE*, III, p. 594: an intellectual's role is not 'to state prophetic truths for the future', but 'to make people realize what is going on in any domains in which the intellectual may be competent'.
5 *DE*, IV, pp. 731–2; see *DE*, IV, pp. 409–10, which provides a historical overview of 'care of the self', taking in both paganism and Christianity, in which Foucault also alludes to Burkhardt's view of a Renaissance hero.
6 On Foucault's receptiveness to novelty, see an article that he published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, in October 1978, before Khomeini's victory: the idea of an Islamic government 'impressed me by virtue of its attempt, in response to present problems, to politicize structures that were indissociably, at once social and religious'. This article is reprinted in *DE*, III, p. 688, and in *Histoire de l'islam et des musulmans en France du Moyen Age à nos jours*, ed. M. Arkoun (Albin Michel, 2006), p. 972.
7 Nietzsche nevertheless continued to want life, to want it just as it is, and even to want an eternal return to the same.
8 Alfred de Vigny, 'La maison du berger' ('The Shepherd's Home'), *Les Destinées*.
9 *DE*, I, p. 695.
10 Alfred de Vigny, 'Le Mont des oliviers' ('The Mount of Olives'), *Les Destinées*.
11 About forty years ago, Roger Caillois and Claude Lévi-Strauss clashed on this point. Caillois maintained that an ethnologist should champion the culture that enabled him to be an ethnologist. As is well known, the problem is whether 'Western' thought, with its rationality and curiosity in the thought of others, is but a historical episode, an accident, or is, on the contrary, the destiny of or a desirable destination for the whole of humanity. This was a question which, on the eve of the Second World War, tormented Husserl in his work entitled *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*.
12 Foucault was born in 1926, the rest of us in 1930, but we were still students whereas, at the École normale, Foucault was one of our teachers; like Althusser, he was a 'cayman'.

13 And, conversely, 'to judge someone on the basis of his university standing' (someone such as Lacan or Barthes) was, as Foucault saw it, by no means complimentary. This was a continuation of the little war that was waged between the university and essayists. It had begun when Taine attacked the heirs to Victor Cousin, continued in the *Revue Blanche* and Péguy's criticism of Brunetière and Lanson, and culminated around 1900 in the clash about Baudelaire. A similar battle raged, in our own times, around Barthes. Foucault received university legitimation, thanks to the respect and support of the severe Canguilhem in the university and the caustic Vuillemin in the Collège de France. Neither of these two was at all in favour of Foucault's negation of universality, rationality and normality, but they did respect his intelligence. However, Canguilhem regarded him more as a poet than as a historian or a philosopher, as can be seen from W. Clark's account of the defence of Foucault's thesis in the Sorbonne, in 1961, *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés*, I, ed. Christian Jacob (Albin Michel, 2007), pp. 91–2 and 95–7. A temperamental affinity also played its part: both Canguilhem and Vuillemin had distinguished themselves in the French Resistance. As Daniel Defert testifies, on his deathbed, Foucault said: 'Tell Canguilhem to come; he knows how to die.' Courage makes for a common motherland.

14 So far as I know, he had no connections with any militant gay group. Of course, it has been said that it was out of gay solidarity that he got Roland Barthes elected to the Collège de France; but that was just gossip. I know that his reasons for doing so, which I did not support, were altogether different.

15 In his lifetime, he never had any profound influence, although he did enjoy great success, thanks to the originality of his style, which turned a work as difficult as *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) into a best-seller. A friend of mine, addressing her secondary-school philosophy class at the start of the school year, read out to her young students a page from Sartre, one from Lévi-Strauss and one from Foucault. Only the page from Foucault, through its style more than its obscure words, plunged them into a bewitched silence. The success of his lectures at the Collège de France (the lecture hall was so

crammed that many listeners sat on the floor and in the aisles, or else followed the lecture on a screen installed in another room) stemmed more from the music of his style than from the content of his words.

16 Foucault had close links with the daily newspaper *Libération*, and relations with the CFDT trade union (the Confédération Française des Travailleurs) and its secretary Edmond Maire. He was friendly with Simone Signoret and Yves Montand, who had become opponents of the internal policies of the Soviet Union. In 1981, he did not support the Socialists' arrival in power. I imagine, but do not know for sure, that he preferred Rocard to Mitterand. At the time of his death, Foucault was preparing a critique of French Socialism (he had a whole pile of books on the question, on his bedside table). According to him, the Socialist Party had never elaborated a real policy.

17 *DE*, II, p. 304; I, p. 574.

18 *DE*, IV, p. 535.

19 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 17.

20 *DE*, IV, p. 675.

21 This was what he illustrated in *L'Education sentimentale*, the extremely metaphysical realism of which is one of life constantly unravelling. Albert Thibaudet commented that this was a novel about the world as it would be if Will were non-existent. Hence, 'the continuous, monotonous, dreary, endless succession of its pages', as Proust so aptly put it, in which 'things have as much life as human beings' (hence Flaubert's 'mania for perpetual description', which Barbey d'Aurevilly held against him). And, given that Frédéric Moreau is equally lacking in will, the novel and its hero 'mutually reflect each other'. Therein lies the key to this masterpiece that some find so sickly, while others adore it. The novel is a manifesto for that *contemptus mundi*, the disdain for things of this world that is practised by more than one religion. To leave the world is to depersonalize oneself: Flaubert's religion is not that of art but that of 'objectivity', art being no more than a means to an end (for Foucault, the means was erudition; for René Char, it was poetry). Hence, also, Flaubert's mania for useless 'documentation' (e.g., the exact time of the train to Auxerre). I cannot bring this parenthesis to a close without citing the fine book by Jean Borie (*Frédéric et les amis*

des hommes: présentation de L'Education sentimentale (Grasset, 1995)).

22 See the first page of *L'Ordre du discours*.

23 In the poem entitled *L'Allégeance* [translator's note: an unusual word, taken from metalwork; it might be translated as 'Smoothing things over'] and elsewhere too. The poet (who is himself different from the human being whom he momentarily inhabits) disappears into his poem 'like a fortunate shipwreck' ('*comme une épave heureuse*', the particular line that Foucault cites in *L'Ordre du discours*, p. 9, without naming the author (which was his way of honouring him: assuming that he would be known to all)). Foucault frequently cites Char without naming him: '*Jadis l'herbe était bonne au fou et hostile au bourreau*' ('There was a time when the grass was good to the madman and hostile to the executioner'), in *L'Histoire de la folie* (Gallimard, coll. Tel), p. 320; other citations appear in *DE*, I, pp. 164, 167 (at the top and the bottom of the page) and 197; in *Les mots et les choses*, p. 35 ('*les clartés de l'herbe*' [clearings in the grass]); in *L'Histoire de la folie*, p. 95 (the extremely rare word, *allégir*, to smooth away), pp. 320, 549, and see p. 546 (where Char, on the contrary, writes '*sa solitaire vraisemblance*' [his solitary verisimilitude]). See also the epigraph in *DE*, I, p. 65, and the citation from Char on the back cover of *L'Histoire de la sexualité*. As we have noted above, the word *intransitif* (intransitive), which he turns into a technical term, is borrowed from *Partage formel* (*Formal Division*).

24 *DE*, IV, p. 536. See IV, p. 675, and IV, p. 42.

CHAPTER 11 PORTRAIT OF A SAMURAI

1 M. Weber, *Sociologie des religions*, ed. Grossein-Passeron (Gallimard, coll. Tel, 2006), p. 228.

2 I am thinking of Weber's theoretical works, not his contemporary political texts.

3 Charles Andler, *Nietzsche, sa vie, sa pensée* (Gallimard, 1958), vol. II, p. 612; vol. III, p. 486.

4 He eventually confided to me that only one of his pupils knew his secret: a student of science whose name had become proverbial by reason of his flamboyant heterosexuality and his

feminine conquests. For this Don Juan, as for Foucault, desire – or rather pleasure – had become a common, shared value.

5 With the composer Jean Barraqué; see D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Flammarion, 1989), pp. 86–90.

6 According to Mme Foucault, mentioned by Didier Eribon in his biography of Foucault.

7 On the right to commit suicide, see *DE*, III, p. 777. See Nietzsche, Band I, 25 [226]: 'Death. We must turn the stupid physiological fact into a moral necessity. Live in such a way as to have a will to die at the appropriate moment.'

8 Not one of his close friends guessed what was wrong; we only found out the day after his death. According to Daniel Defert, Foucault himself had written in his notebook: 'I know that I have AIDS but, in my hysteria, I forget about it.'

9 I am here taking up a story that Didier Eribon published in his *Michel Foucault*, p. 34, and do so with his kind authorization.

10 The most recent report on Foucault's health had not been good. Two days earlier, my wife had been told by the doctors at the Salpêtrière Hospital that they no longer knew what they could do for him. I was on the motorway, on my way out of Paris, when I found myself being overtaken by a powerful, fast-moving, large green vehicle, with an unusually shaped rectangular rear. As it passed, I recognized Foucault at the wheel. He turned his sharp face to me and flashed me a thin smile. I put my foot down and accelerated in order to catch up with him, but lifted it again as the hallucinatory character of this vision dawned upon me, for a hallucination is distinct from a true perception with its own *index sui*. I had understood the allegory: Foucault was going where we would all go and his intelligence far outstripped my own. The car disappeared into the distance or vanished (I don't know which). The whole incident had lasted half a minute at the most. When I told Passeron about it, he made one point that had escaped me: the strange shape of the back of the vehicle was that of a hearse. Had this been a hallucination or a daydream? The vision had the allegorical ingenuity of dreams just prior to awakening, when one's mind is already half-awake.

11 When, for example, he had taken a dislike to some colleague and had treated him to some of the cutting remarks that rose to his lips all too easily.

12 'It's a strange courage/You give me, ancient star:/Shine alone in the sunrise/Toward which you lend no part.'
13 In one of his lectures, Jean-Pierre Vernant had Marlene Dietrich sitting in the front row, with her legs crossed.
14 '*Essa è la luce eterna di Sigieri,/che leggendo nel vico de li strami,/sillogizò invidiosi veri*', 'truths that earned him hatred', *Paradiso*, X.136.

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